



Patient Information ... What Exactly did the Doctor Order?

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So if we were to step back a moment from the madness that consumes our daily lives, we would have to contemplate why we do what we do, and who we do it for.

We do what we do to improve health, with health being defined as: "The general condition of the body; the condition of being sound in body, mind, or spirit; especially freedom from physical disease or pain; flourishing condition: well being".

We do it for "Canadians".

We do this because it is important to Canadians; Canadians who expect to receive appropriate, quality, publicly funded healthcare and support.... "in their communities, in their province and across the nation".

We achieve this through collaboration with a qualified team ... "a health team that guides the **process** with the patient to identify problems with or opportunities for health, adjusts and monitors as necessary to reach the objective of holistic health with the Patient".

All of this leads up to the question for contemplation in this article: "**Are we organized to provide the best healthcare for Patients in the way that they deserve?**"

Well I would have to say, "not quite, but we are moving in that direction".

Traditionally, our healthcare objectives, processes, systems and data have been organized by and for the various levels of organizations, the provider and the medical events. Critical information about the Patient has not been shared in a collaborative, meaningful or effective way. Boundaries for patient data have been established across business entities, concrete walls, geographic boundaries and political lines. These are serious barriers to providing quality care for the Patient.

Overall the health of Canadians can be very complex, and to reach this objective, a patient-centric approach is necessary. The nucleus of the patient care is the Patient. The universe beyond this nucleus begins with the primary care team that includes the physician. The primary care team is multi-disciplinary in nature to provide a coordinated approach and continuity to

primary care. The primary care physician is generally the first point of entry into the healthcare system and the continuing focal point of all required healthcare services. Primary care providers take a holistic approach to promoting health, preventing disease and maintaining health. They will provide counseling, patient education, diagnosis and treatment of acute and chronic illnesses.

The Patient and his/her team(s) of healthcare providers must work collaboratively to reach and maintain Patient health. Information and communication are absolutely critical to a team-based approach.

For care beyond the expertise or availability of this team, the Primary Care team may facilitate additional support from other team members or the Patient may present on their own. Appropriate information regarding the Patient is then necessary for the efficient, safe, quality care in the outer layers of the Patient's care model.

These clinical teams are attempting to function in a healthcare environment that is considerably more sophisticated, specialized and geographically dispersed than traditional healthcare. Providing healthcare teams with useful clinical information management tools is paramount to their success. Without these tools, coordination of care is clumsy at best, errors and adverse events are common, wait times are long, quality of care is suspect and healthcare costs will continue to accelerate. The Electronic Medical Record (EMR) and the Electronic Health Record (EHR) together have the potential to reverse these trends and facilitate continuity of care for each patient, providing an important and complimentary source of information to assist healthcare teams deliver high quality, cost effective care.

The key here is the phrase "the EMR and EHR together have the potential...."

Supporting the Patient's primary care team are clinical information management tools, often referred to as electronic medical records (EMRs). The EMR allows the physician and other members of a formal team to coordinate care for the patient. Each patient's EMR contains the information about the patient – their condition, medical history, prescribed medication,

allergies, and lab test results. The electronic record is effective for patient follow-up and management, coordination of care and case management for the patient between other health providers as required. The EMR also supports the electronic ordering of lab tests and prescriptions, coupled with clinical decision support resulting in fewer errors. The primary care team can also use systems-generated information to plan for and to proactively manage population health. Patients receive better care and can take an active role in managing their health including on-line scheduling of appointments, disease management. Patients and physicians also enjoy quicker, more effective referrals for specialized services. Maintaining the patient electronic medical record and securely sharing salient aspects of the patient's record with the medical community is very important to the universal care of the patient.

The role of the Patient's Electronic Health Record (EHR) is to provide essential patient information to the larger community of healthcare providers as necessary. An Electronic Health Record is not a complete patient medical record. Much of the patient information recorded by the health provider remains within the provider's domain. A set of pertinent composite patient data is stored within the EHR. As the Electronic Health Record takes shape, matures and expands its access and delivery of health information, the support and benefits will grow.

Safe, timely, effective healthcare in their own communities and across the nation is a priority for Canadians. Integration of EHR information on regional, provincial, national levels should offer an information tool that will efficiently link healthcare providers from internal and external

to their communities, helping them to work more effectively with patients as a multi-disciplinary team. A collaborative approach is needed to accomplish the building of as well as the sharing of EHR records. Healthcare providers are the drivers and the key to successful building and integration of EHRs. All components of an EHR are equally necessary to provide a comprehensive, valuable tool. All providers must work together with patients to enable the improvement of patient care and overall health system management.

In areas where an EHR is accessible, the results have been extremely positive. They have reported benefits to team-based care and patient outcomes. In addition to improving staff workflow through faster, more reliable handling of patient records, quick access to key health information benefits both providers and patients. With better information and an ability to link to decision-making support, an EHR influences care decisions and improves patient safety. In a recent evaluation survey, physicians and staff said their EHR reduced duplicate tests and procedures, reduced administrative burden to obtain information and reduced wait times for patients.

The focus shift to the Patient as the primary stakeholder in healthcare has highlighted the need for integrated Patient information. An integrated EMR/EHR environment will facilitate this. Now as Patients we must also take an active role in ensuring that the tools available are used effectively to boost the performance of our healthcare into a much sought after and treasured safe, efficient and effective team-based care model.

And that is just what the doctor ordered! ●