

NEW ELECTRONIC REFERRAL SYSTEM AIMS TO IMPROVE ACCESS FOR PATIENTS AND CARE PROVIDERS

Kitchener, ON: The eHealth Centre of Excellence, in collaboration with the Waterloo Wellington Community Care Access Centre (WWCCAC) and the Waterloo Wellington Local Health Integration Network (WWLHIN), are pleased to announce that they have selected an Ontario-based consortium of Think Research, CognisantMD, and the Centre for Effective Practice (CEP) to lead the design and deployment of a ground-breaking electronic referral (eReferral) platform for the Waterloo Wellington community.

As part of the System Coordinated Access (SCA) program, this new and exciting partnership of vendors will work with family physicians, specialists, community service providers, patients and family caregivers across the region to create a technological ecosystem that will support a system-wide eReferral process. This process will enable faster links between patients and healthcare providers and create a more seamless experience when moving from one part of the healthcare system to another.

How will this technology impact healthcare providers?

Ensuring patients have access to timely and appropriate care requires an effective referral system. Currently, many healthcare providers are using manual processes, such as paper-based fax referral forms, which are processed slowly and prone to error.

Working with the Think Research Consortium and system partners, the SCA program will look to remove inefficiencies in current practice by bringing together new and pre-existing referral processes and systems into a secure online platform where standardized information can flow and be distributed across the continuum of care.

This solution will leverage CognisantMD's successful [Ocean eReferral Platform](#), which is used in many healthcare organizations across the province, and has already been proven to streamline and coordinate the referral process.

"One of the biggest challenges in healthcare technology is the sheer number of disconnected systems that make it difficult to share patient information between organizations," notes Sachin Aggarwal, CEO of Think Research. "The SCA program's new eReferral platform will connect those silos, allowing clinicians to share patient information in real-time."

Healthcare providers will be able to submit eReferrals directly from their electronic medical record, and the standardized eReferral forms will be housed in the platform – resulting in improvements in the completeness and appropriateness of referrals made to specialists, programs and services.

"Through this partnership, we are ensuring that healthcare providers are supported by integrating the solution with their own systems and workflow," says Dr. Mohamed Alarakhia, Director of the eHealth Centre of Excellence.

How will this technology support patients and caregivers?

From a patient and caregiver perspective, navigating the healthcare system can be extremely challenging. Waterloo resident Alison Hendry coordinates care for her parents, and notes that accessing the broad range of services available has required a significant commitment of time and energy on her part: "It can be a full-time job, learning about what resources are available and then understanding the processes you need to go through to access them. Patients and caregivers would really benefit from more clarity."

“It’s important that we build a system that keeps patients and their caregivers at the centre of the conversation,” says Aggarwal. That’s why, in addition to making it easier to share information between healthcare providers, the eReferral platform will provide access to a user-friendly portal where patients can find up-to-date information about available services (e.g. support groups and education, chronic disease prevention and management programs, etc.), complete with descriptions, map-based locations, and wait-times. Patients will also have the ability to book themselves directly into self-management programs and view current referrals along with details and instructions about appointments.

“This innovative eReferral system will empower patients and caregivers by making information readily accessible, with just the click of a button,” says Dr. Alarakhia.

“Residents of Waterloo Wellington have some of the best healthcare resources available, and this new eReferral system has potential to make them even better,” adds Hendry. “It’s a major step forward.”

What are the next steps?

The SCA program will focus on three high priority referral pathways in the initial phase: improving access to Diabetes programs, Orthopedic Specialists, and Chronic Disease Prevention and Management resources. From there, the SCA program intends to expand the eReferral platform to other programs and services across the WWLHIN and eventually to other partnering LHINs.

“The SCA program sees this as a real opportunity to engage our health system partners to build out a solution that works for all,” says Lori Moran, SCA Program Manager. “We want to create something that supports the diverse and complex needs of the system – not only for today, but also for years to come.”

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About our organizations:

SCA program: Hosted by the eHealth Centre of Excellence and in partnership with the WWCCAC and the WWLHIN, the SCA program aims to improve linkages and communication between patients, referrers, and healthcare providers by supporting the coordination of access to health services and leveraging innovative technology to bring new and pre-existing referral processes into a connected, secure online environment.

eHealth Centre of Excellence: A division of the Centre for Family Medicine Family Health Team, the eHealth Centre of Excellence was established in 2014 with the vision of creating a collaborative space to share knowledge, develop best practices, and enable the deployment of digital health tools to support improved clinical care.

Think Research: For nearly a decade, Think Research has worked closely with healthcare organizations to develop and implement clinical decision support tools. Our entire suite of clinical applications is easily accessible at the point-of-care through our secure, cloud-based platform, EntryPoint. All of our solutions are designed to standardize clinical practice, by rooting decision making in evidence-based best practice, to improve the quality and cost of care.

CognisantMD: CognisantMD is the nation's leading provider of EMR-integrated patient engagement solutions. Using mobile devices and a cloud-based architecture, the Ocean Platform allows patients and healthcare providers to securely share health information for clinical use, administration, referrals and research.

Centre for Effective Practice: CEP is an independent, not-for-profit organization that aims to close the gap between evidence and practice for healthcare providers by giving them the resources and tools they need to provide the best care to their patients. CEP engages with providers to create solutions based on best-evidence that can be adapted into the local context.

