



eConsult: A case study from a specialist perspective on outcomes of providing consultation to primary care providers using eConsult

eConsult enables secure communication between specialists and primary care providers, conveniently integrating into a specialist's workflow, supporting specialist compensation for time spent consulting, while reducing unnecessary referrals with timely and evidence-informed recommendations for patient care.

Although widely occurring, requests for informal consultations from primary care providers to specialists can interrupt a specialist's work day and pose concerns about the quality and adequacy of information exchanged, confidentiality, privacy and security.¹ In addition, there are many cases where specialists are not compensated for their time, with a National Physician Survey² noting that 84% of specialists in Ontario providing email consultations to other physicians do not have a method of compensation.

Provision of consultation to support patient management in primary care is important but access can be difficult due to the wait times of many specialists.¹ Electronic consultations (eConsults) pose an opportunity to enable consultations through a medium that addresses the concerns of traditional informal consultations while supporting specialist compensation.³ The optimal use of eConsult, where appropriate, to support specialist resources efficiently and to meet patient needs, ensure that only patients that need to have an in-person visit, receive one.

As of January 2020, there are
>900 specialists and **>150 specialties** on
eConsult in Ontario



eConsult

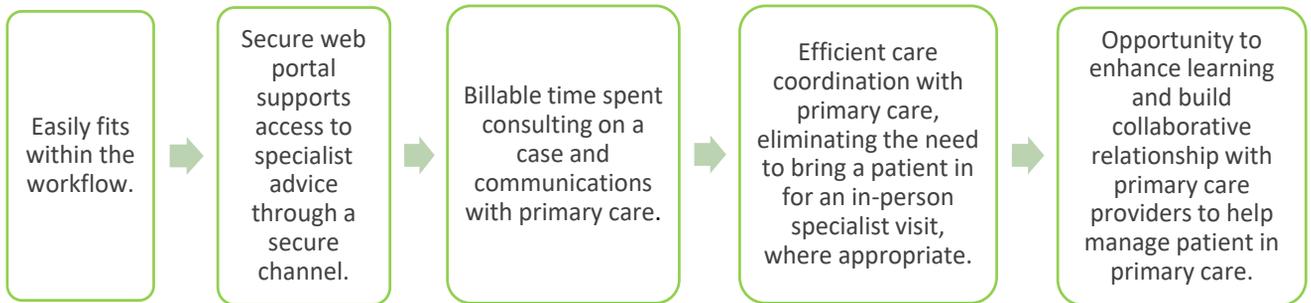
Dr. Bob Lee adopted eConsult, a secure email messaging system that uses the Ontario Telemedicine Network to connect primary care providers with specialists, and now serves as a consultant specialist addressing questions from primary care providers across Ontario on a broad spectrum of cases related to sports and exercise-related injuries.

As an advocate of digital technologies that support clinical workflow and information sharing and management, Dr. Lee recognized the great potential in eConsult as a tool to streamline information flow and provide a medium for knowledge exchange to enable timely patient care.

“eConsult presents an opportunity to not only provide timely patient advice through a secure communication channel and avoid ‘soft’ referrals, it also provides me with the opportunity to teach and share best practice management guidelines backed by evidence-informed research in the field. When used to its full potential, eConsult greatly enhances secure information sharing between specialists and primary care providers, and provides a better option to seek specialist advice, providing care for patients who may not need to visit the specialist in person.”

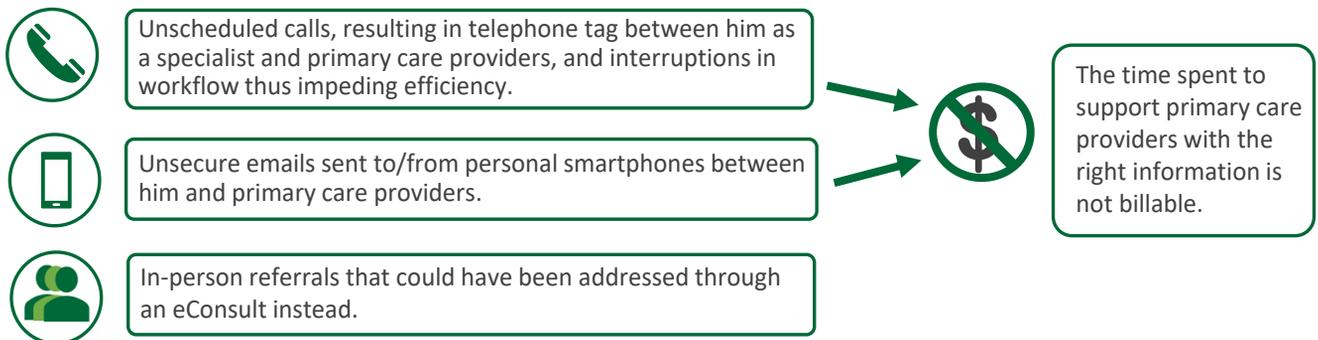
- Dr. Bob Lee, MD, Dip. Sport Medicine, (CASEM)

Since adopting eConsult, Dr. Lee has seen the following benefits:



Dr. Lee's experiences are in accordance with a study conducted with other specialists who have adopted eConsult, noting innovative patient care, reduced patient wait times, and improved direct communications with primary care providers.³ In addition, a study conducted on the impact of eConsults illustrated that 39% of eConsults conducted avoided a referral to the specialist⁴, meeting patient needs in a timely manner and ensuring appropriate referrals, so that specialist resources are used effectively and efficiently.

In the absence of eConsult use by primary care providers, Dr. Lee experiences:



As a higher number of primary care providers adopt eConsult, the optimal use of eConsult not only supports better care coordination and timely patient care through a secure communication platform, but it also supports specialist compensation while allowing for a seamless fit into their clinical workflow.

If you have any questions or would like further information on this case study, contact communications@ehealthce.ca.

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Works Cited:

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4. Keely, E. (2019). The successful integration of eConsult service into a Family Health Team's workflow. Ontario eConsult Centre of Excellence.

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