

# eReferral Solution

When primary care physicians collect their patients' email addresses and include them on the electronic referral form, patients are more informed and satisfied with their healthcare experience.

## Background

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's patient-centered model of care action plan, "Patients First", outlines the Ministry's substantial support for timely access to care, integration and continuity of care, and clear, rapid communication with patients throughout the referral process, from PCP to the specialist (1). However, actively keeping patients informed throughout the referral process can be difficult and time consuming, which creates a barrier to achieving that action plan.

In a qualitative research study conducted in Alberta, patients expressed their frustration with the lack of information once they begin the referral process. They have reported feeling as if their referral had been sent into a "black hole," which left them to speculate about its progress (2). Failure to communicate with patients throughout the referral process leads to frustration and reduces patient adherence to the management plan (3).

### Communication with Patients throughout the eReferral process

The Ocean eReferral solution went live in the Waterloo Wellington LHIN in August 2017. If patients consent to having their email address included in the eReferral, the solution will automatically generate email notifications for the patient throughout the referral process, providing them with all of the specific information on that particular referral. The email messages could include a range of relevant information including the name and address of the clinic, appointment details, forms, special instructions, an opportunity to confirm the appointment, and a feedback survey link.

**The Ministry supports digital health initiatives including the use of email communication for patients. As outlined in the April 2018 Family Health Team Agreement, the Ministry states that "the Recipient must make reasonable efforts within the Budget included in Schedule "B" to ensure that the option of email communication is available to patients."**

The SCA Patient and Caregiver working group in Waterloo Wellington was actively involved in helping to design this patient experience survey, which was then programmed into the referral solution as an online survey.



Members of the SCA Patient and Caregiver Working Group in Waterloo Wellington

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**Puts more control in the hands of the patient because they have the information they need**

**Fantastic system...great to see technology coming in place to make things better for PATIENTS**

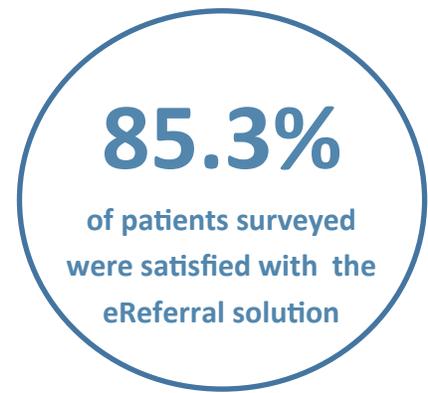
**I like the fact that it was emailed and I didn't have to write it down somewhere, only to have it get misplaced**

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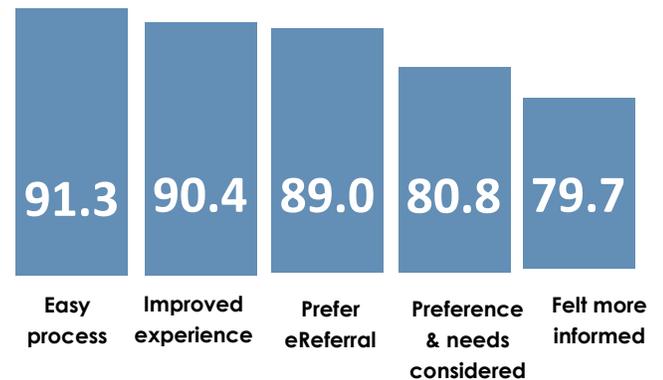
eReferral Patients

## Benefits

Preliminary results from 106 patients who have completed the online patient experience survey show that most of the participants (85.3%) were satisfied with the eReferral and notification system. Moreover, 80.8% of participants reported that their preference options and needs were considered during the referral process. The majority (91.3%) agreed that the electronic referral process ran smoothly and was easy to follow. More than three-quarters of participants (79.7%) agreed that they felt more informed throughout the referral process and 89% preferred the eReferral process to their past referral experience. Most of the participants (90.4%) agreed that receiving a confirmation e-mail about their appointment booking has improved their experience.



### Level of agreement with process (%)



## About the SCA Program

The System Coordinated Access (SCA) Program was originally initiated to support the development and adoption of electronic referral in the Waterloo Wellington region. As a result of an investment by the Ontario Government, the program, in collaboration with the Think Research Consortium (Think Research, CognisantMD and Centre for Effective Practice), has now expanded to support the implementation of eReferral to four additional LHINs.

eReferral replaces paper-based faxes with electronic referrals. Using integrated electronic medical records, referrals are sent, tracked and updated right from the patient's electronic chart. The local SCA deployment teams provide training, solution set-up and support.

## Works Cited

1. Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. Patient First: Action Plan to Health Care. Published April 2017. Accessed Dec 2017.
2. Health Quality Council of Alberta. Patient Perspectives on an Electronic Referral System for Alberta. Published January 2016. Accessed Dec 11 2017.
3. Piterman L. and Koritsas S. Part II. General practitioner-specialist referral process. Internal Medicine Journal 2005; 35: 491-496

## Contact

If you have any questions or would like further information on this Benefits Realization (BR) case, please contact

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Published: May 2018



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