eReferral Solution

Electronic referral is enabling patient-centred care for the aging population and improving their overall healthcare experience.

Background

Communication between providers and patients is crucial to providing effective patient-centered care. The aging population and complex care scenarios create a need for an improved communication approach.[1] Timely, informative, and accessible communication is the key to proper engagement of patients in supporting transitions in care. Communicating throughout the referral process using the traditional methods (paper or telephone-based) consumes a significant amount of time and resources within most healthcare practices.[2] Moreover, many patients feel frustrated as they rarely receive communication during the referral process and are often left uninformed.[2]

Communication technologies pose a solution to communication issues[2] and have had a consistent increase in uptake in the recent decade, across all age groups.[3] Data from Statistics Canada shows that 70% of seniors report that they use technology to communicate with others.[3] This is important to note as an opportunity to enhance healthcare experience among seniors who often experience complex health issues and require more referrals would most benefit from enhanced communication practices.

To improve the patient experience within the healthcare system and to support clinicians in providing efficient PCC, an electronic referral (eReferral) solution has been has been deployed in three of the five Ontario Health regions across the province (West, East and North). eReferral is managed by the Systems Coordinated Access (SCA) Program and funded by the Ministry of Health.

The eReferral solution streamlines the referral process and improves communication between healthcare providers. The solution provides patients with automated email notifications, which allows patients (who have provided consent) to be involved in the referral communication process. The email notifications include key pieces of information about the patient's referral such as current location of the referral, appointment time and preparation instructions. This case highlights that aging populations are open and willing to use email technology as a method of communication within the healthcare system.

"

Being away for the winter in Florida, this process made it much easier for me.

Patient age 70 plus

Electronic messaging /referral is the way things are in the 21st century, even for us older folk.

Patient age 60—69

I am not very "computer savvy" but found this process easy to navigate.

Patient age 70 plus

"

System Coordinated Access

eHealth
CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

ehealthce.ca

systemcoordinatedaccess.ca

Benefits

When patients receive notification of their booked appointment, they are invited to complete the online satisfaction survey embedded in the notification e-mail. This was implemented to gain insight into the patients' experience throughout the eReferral process. The data provided evidence illustrating the positive patient experience with the electronic referral system. Having more than half of the respondents aged 60 or older shows that older populations find it widely acceptable to use technology to communicate.

57%
of survey respondents are over the age of 60
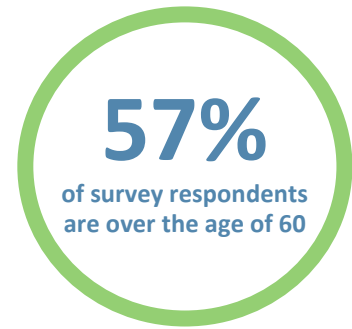
A total of **2295 patient satisfaction surveys were completed** between November 2018 and September 2019. Of these, 1299 were patients over the age of 60. The open-ended survey responses were analyzed, and the comments showed that the patient experience has been improved. The emerging themes from the analysis are reflective of those recently documented in an article published by the members of the SCA Program (Mohammed & Huebner, 2019).[6] Overall, the data supports the use of digital health technology to enhance the care experience for the aging population.

Efficient Process
Older patients noted that the email notifications and eReferral abilities saved time and was faster than previous methods of communication.

Patient-centred
Older patients also noted that their experience with referrals has improved due to various reasons. Some felt more informed and less stressed and many prefer this communication method.

Ease of Use
Older respondents noted that the process was much more convenient, easy, required less work and placed less stress on the patient.

> **I find this method to be very efficient. My doctors appointment was yesterday and today I have an appointment scheduled!**
> Patient aged 60—69

> **This is better than having to wait until the Specialist calls to confirm that the request has been made. Gives me a "heads-up" that the wheels are in motion.** Patient aged 70 or older

> **It is an easy way of doing this rather than use mail or phone.** Patient aged 70 or older

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 Ocean eReferrals to three of five Ontario Health regions.

eReferral replaces paper-based faxes with electronic referrals. Through a secure integration with 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. Canadian Medical Association. (2013). *Health and Health Care for an Aging Population*. Policy Summary.
2. Vermeir P, Vandijck D, Degroote S, Peleman R, Verhaeghe R, Mortier E, Hallaert G, Van Daele S, Buylaert W, Vogelaers D. (2015). *Communication in healthcare: a narrative review of the literature and practical recommendations*. International journal of clinical practice; 69 (11):1257-67. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcp.12686.
3. Davidson, J. and Schimmele, C., (2019). *Evolving Internet Use Among Canadian Seniors*. Retrieved from Statistics Canada: https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2019015-eng.htm
4. Statistics Canada. "Seniors Online." *The Daily,* 15 April, 2019, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2019024-eng.pdf?st=soivB1ny.
5. Canadian Healthcare Technology. (2019, September 25). Seniors feel confident about using online tech. Retrieved from https://www.canhealth.com/2019/09/25/seniors-feel-confident-about-using-online-tech/.
6. Mohammed, H.T., & Huebner, L.A. *(2019) Quality Management in Health Care. In Press.*

Contact

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

Kayla Wierts, Analyst, eCE

Communications@ehealthCE.ca

This document is not to be reprinted without permission from the eHealth Centre of Excellence.

Published: January 2020