

Evaluating benefits is an important component of the connecting South West Ontario (cSWO) Program that helps to support and demonstrate the realization of health system benefits through the adoption of electronic health records (EHRs). By pursuing the measurement of organizational value (improvements in the efficiency of care delivery such as time-savings and redirected resources) and clinical value (patients undergo fewer unnecessary tests, patients have improved access to care), patients ultimately benefit from higher quality, better informed clinical decision-making.

The cSWO Analysis and Research program uses a research-based approach to identify areas of clinical best practice that are affected by the use of EHRs, and works collaboratively with clinicians to understand the value of EHRs. This formative evaluation process informs change management and adoption, and enables clinicians to use EHRs more effectively. This research does not include the use of any personal health information.

This document is one in a series of case studies which describe the clinical value of EHRs in different clinical settings and contexts, particularly with respect to clinical best practices. The work of the cSWO Analysis and Research program is ongoing; depending on the circumstance, these cases occasionally raise questions for further investigation, and clinicians are invited to participate in analysis and research to continue to develop these answers.

Value statement

Access to electronic health records (EHRs) through the cSWO Regional Clinical Viewer, ClinicalConnect™, supports family physicians in West Niagara coordinate care for their patients across the care continuum.

Integration leads to continuity of care

Effective care coordination leads to more seamless transitions for patients and families, reduces duplication, increases quality of care, facilitates access, and contributes to better value by reducing costs. Primary care is an anchor for patients and families to navigate through the health care system. The primary care team model, which includes the Family Health Team (FHT), improves care coordination by increasing communication between healthcare providers through the use of a common electronic medical record (EMR). This kind of seamless integration improves communication among providers, results in less conflicting advice from care providers, and facilitates the transfer of data between providers.¹

Physicians from the Beamsville and Smithville FHTs are able to take this even further as members of the medical staff at West Lincoln Memorial Hospital (WLMH). WLMH, a Hamilton Health Sciences site serving over 65,000 residents of West Niagara, takes a community-focused approach to health care, with family physicians playing an essential part in the delivery of health care within the hospital setting.²

Through this model, both family health teams are able to provide a high level of integration and continuity of care to their patient population. The physicians are typically the most responsible physician when their patients are admitted to WLMH, and are thus able to provide ongoing care from admission through discharge and post-discharge follow-up. As a result of their hospital privileges, they are also able to interact with other specialists on an ongoing basis to provide more rapid and appropriate referrals for their patients.³

Access to EHRs supports effective care coordination

The Beamsville and Smithville FHT physicians are able to access their patients EHRs to support them in preparing for ongoing and follow-up visits at the medical centre, conducting house calls, and caring for patients while in hospital.

Without access to ClinicalConnect, Dr. Bellaire, a physician from the Smithville FHT, indicated that she would have to call all of the hospital departments to see if she had to do rounds that day with her patients. Now she can simply check from home on her mobile device, which saves her tremendous time and allows her to better plan her day. Remote access is also

very helpful when conducting house calls for extremely ill patients. While working in the Emergency Department (ED) at WLMH, Dr. Bellaire accesses ClinicalConnect for one out of three patients, finding it useful for checking lab results done in the community to either avoid unnecessary duplication of lab tests or use them as comparison to determine whether the changes in results are chronic or acute.

Dr. Volz, the lead physician at the Beamsville FHT, accesses ClinicalConnect several times a day. Reviewing the patients EHRs enables him to be well-prepared when the patient arrives for a follow-up appointment. ClinicalConnect is very helpful in bringing on new patients by giving him access to the patient’s history much sooner than waiting for the file to arrive from the previous family physician’s office. As an ED physician at WLMH, he often treats patients who are confused and can’t really speak for themselves, so having access to their EHRs makes it much easier to provide quality care. As a hospitalist, Dr. Volz is assigned “orphan” patients (i.e. those who do not have family physicians) for a week at a time. By adding them to his worklist during that period of time, he can quickly get an understanding of their visit histories and test results.

Testimonials

“ClinicalConnect has assisted me in providing comprehensive care for my patients both in my clinic and in hospital, allowing my care to be up to date and timely, and lessens inefficiencies by limiting duplications of investigations.”

Dr. Joan Bellaire, Physician, Smithville FHT

"ClinicalConnect is an invaluable tool that I use every day in a variety of settings. It has revolutionized our EMR by the daily downloads we get for office patients. It helps me tremendously for hospital and ED patients that otherwise don't know their up to date medical information. I can't imagine practicing without it."

Dr. Bernhard Volz, Physician, Beamsville FHT

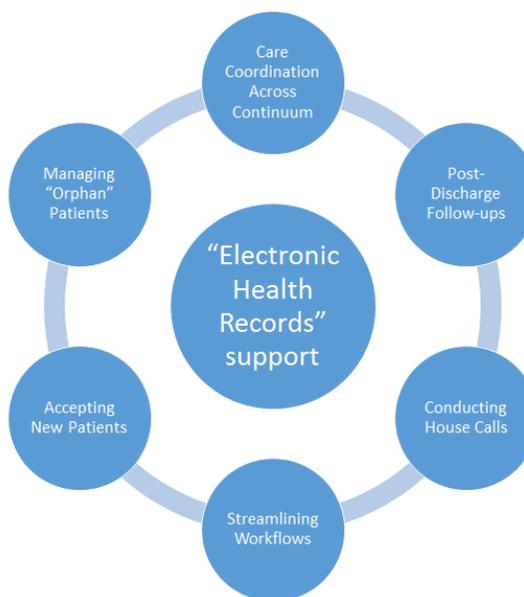


Figure 1: Benefits of accessing EHRs by blended primary/acute physicians

Questions

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Sources

¹ Association of Family Health Teams of Ontario.(2018). Retrieved from: <https://www.afhto.ca/>

² West Lincoln Memorial Hospital. (2018). Retrieved from: <http://wlmh.on.ca/>

³ Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) Narrative for Health Care Organizations in Ontario (2018/19). Retrieved from: <https://qipnavigator.hqontario.ca/Resources/PostedQIPs.aspx>