

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

Having access to the cSWO Regional Clinical Viewer, ClinicalConnect™, has enabled the Heart Investigation Unit (HIU) at Hamilton General Hospital (HGH) to streamline and improve their triage process. The ability to quickly retrieve the required patient information allows the triage coordinator to accurately triage patients, resulting in more effective procedure bookings, increased patient satisfaction, and reduction in Day of Surgery Cancellations (DOSCs).

Streamlining the intake process through access to an EHR

Triage, the process of accurately assigning a degree of urgency to the patient's procedure, involves being able to access relevant patient data, such as patient demographics, past medical history, recent complications, previous laboratory work and stress tests, other medical conditions, and current medications^{1,2}. Gathering this patient information from healthcare providers manually can be time-consuming and may result in delays in scheduling the procedure. An electronic health record (EHR) can help streamline the information gathering process by having all patient information accessible in one place, rather than having to contact a nurse or physician's office to obtain it. Reviewing the patient record will not only help accurately triage the patient, but will also help determine whether a procedure can be done as originally planned, or needs to be postponed or cancelled. This will result in a reduction in the number of DOSCs because of insufficient preoperative testing or continued use of certain medications³. Having immediate access to patient records reduces the time it takes to retrieve patient information, increases the accuracy of the triage process, and facilitates effective scheduling and preoperative planning.

Improving the cardiac triage process for Heart Investigation Units

The HGH Cardiac Triage office is a central triage office serving both Hamilton Health Sciences (HHS) and the Niagara Health (NH) Heart Investigation Units. These units provide interventional cardiac procedures to residents of the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant (HNHB) Local Health Integration Network (LHIN), and are designed to be comprehensive units where patients are registered, prepared for the procedure, recovered, and discharged⁴.

The triage office receives an average of 700 inpatient and outpatient referrals monthly, with an average of 34 procedures performed daily between the two sites. As the patient referrals are often received partially complete, the triage coordinator must obtain the remaining information in order to accurately assign acuity level.

Prior to ClinicalConnect, the information gathering process was lengthy, as the required details had to be requested from inpatient nurses or physician offices; this process would take an average of 15-20 minutes for each referral, and in some cases, could take several days to connect with the appropriate healthcare provider due to scheduling conflicts. This not only impacts the triage coordinator’s ability to effectively book procedures, but also takes time away from the inpatient nurse or family physician that could be spent caring for a patient. The use of ClinicalConnect has enabled the triage coordinator to retrieve required patient information directly through the viewer first, before contacting the nurse or physician’s office for confirmation or clarification if required, significantly reducing the time spent. Not only has this streamlined the intake and triage process, it has also helped determine, in advance, if the patient is not ready for the procedure, ensuring the unit runs at full capacity and improves the patient experience.

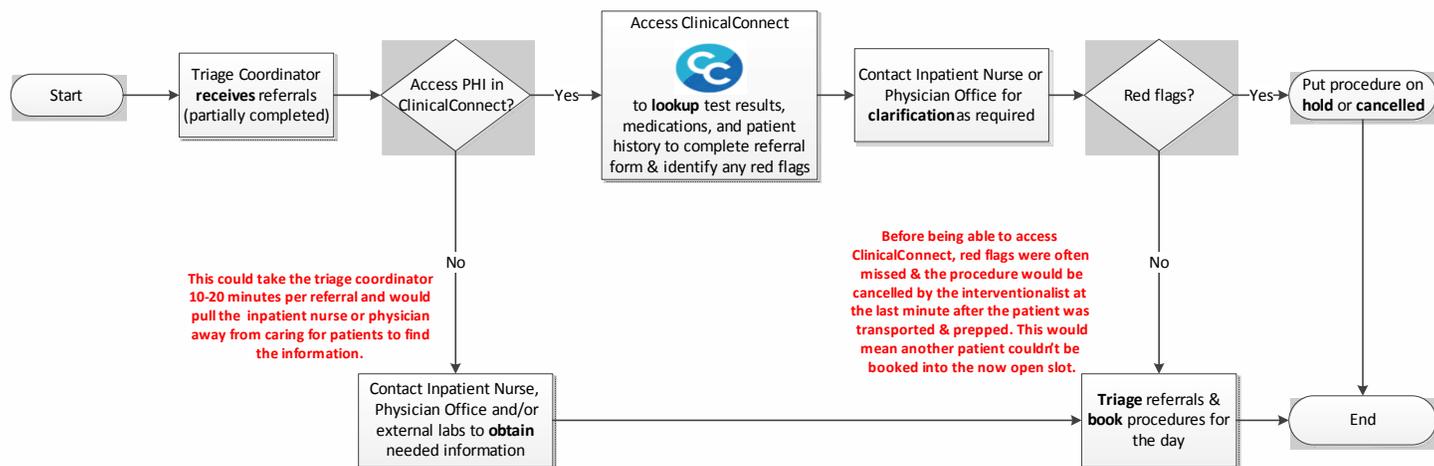


Figure 1. HGH’s Heart Investigation Unit intake process with ClinicalConnect and without ClinicalConnect

Testimonial

“ClinicalConnect has proven to be an essential resource for the Integrated Heart Investigation Units with sites located at the Hamilton General and St. Catharine’s Hospitals. Monthly, our office receives upwards of 700 patient referrals. This is a combination of outpatients and inpatients. Depending on clinical presentation and past medical history, inpatients require their angiograms 24-72 hours from presentation to hospital. Due to demand, inpatients must be triaged and booked in a timely fashion based on clinical acuity. Prior to ClinicalConnect, the triaging of these patients was laborious as each individual unit needed to be consulted by phone to obtain the vital patient clinical information required. With the introduction of ClinicalConnect, up-to-date, accurate, and complete patient data can be obtained independently. The rapid availability of this data ensures that the residents of LHIN 4 are receiving efficient and timely access to care”.

Evelyn Priddle, Nurse, Cardiac and Vascular Program, HGH

Questions

Authored by Wanda Hemsworth, Benefits Realization Lead, and Beth Murray, Benefits Realization Analyst, cSWO Change Management and Adoption Delivery Partner, HITS eHealth Office at Hamilton Health Sciences. For questions, comments, or to participate in cSWO’s Analysis and Research program, please contact: cSWOresearch@lhsc.on.ca.

Sources

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