

Electronic Medical Records

Achieving the promise of EMRs

by Sarah Hutchison, CEO, OntarioMD
Darren Larsen, MD

It is hard to believe that Ontario recently had a low rate of EMR adoption, yet over the span of three years has become a national leader. More than 82% of community-based primary care physicians have adopted an EMR.¹ While this is a significant achievement, realizing the full potential and promise of EMRs requires moving beyond adoption to advanced use.

Many of the potential benefits of EMRs come from being able to collect and use large volumes of data relatively quickly at the practice population level. Use of advanced functionality enables:

- Increased efficiencies in workflow as staff time is redeployed in community-based practices.
- Health system level benefits, such as reduced numbers of duplicate tests and adverse drug events.
- Improved health outcomes and patient safety through preventive care and chronic disease management.
- Improved interactions and communications among care team members and between providers and patients.

OntarioMD has been helping physicians transition from paper to EMRs for the past 10 years, but with adoption having reached such a high level, the organization's focus now turns to

helping physicians advance their use of EMRs, and increasing EMR connectivity to enhance patient care.

EMR Practice Enhancement Program

Advanced EMR use can be daunting to contemplate, much less take on, for busy practitioners with increasing demands on their time and resources.

OntarioMD's EMR Practice Enhancement Program (EPEP) is designed to help physicians identify goals and develop plans for advancing their EMR capabilities. Practitioners have access to a suite of self-directed and consultative services that break down advanced use into a series of meaningful and manageable steps. Progress is measurable according to six levels of EMR maturity, established criteria upon which EMR usage and proficiency is assessed (see table, p.32).

An EPEP pilot has just been completed with a group of 352 physicians,

resulting in 352 customized action plans to advance individual EMR use.

Hospital Report Manager

In response to physician demand, OntarioMD has been instrumental in bringing connectivity initiatives like Hospital Report Manager (HRM) on stream. HRM electronically delivers text-based medical record reports, (e.g., discharge summary), and transcribed diagnostic imaging reports (excluding the image) from sending facilities directly into patients' charts, within the clinician's EMR. Reports that used to take days or even weeks to arrive are now in EMRs within as little as 30 minutes from the time of posting on the hospital's system.

Health care providers across Ontario have embraced HRM:

- HRM is now live with 63 Ontario sending facilities.
- As of April 2015, more than 2,400 clinicians are using HRM.

- Over 190,000 reports per month are being sent directly to clinicians' EMRs.

With well over 1 million reports sent to date, HRM has improved communication between providers, resulting in more co-ordinated and timely patient care. The success of HRM has led to the collaboration of OntarioMD and HRM users in the development of eNotifications — near real-time electronic notifications to community-based family physicians when patients are discharged from the emergency department, or admitted or discharged from in-patient units. Based on the success of the eNotifications pilot, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and eHealth Ontario have approved the expansion of eNotifications through the Client Health and Related Information System (CHRIS) and HRM to other hospitals in the province.

“With the introduction of HRM and eNotifications, our Family Health Team received real time notification from our hospital when patients were seen in the emergency room, or admitted at Toronto East General Hospital. This allowed all clinicians to know the next morning if the reason for the hospital visit was a minor concern dealt with by the hospital, or was more complex and warranted followup by the family physician to ensure that our patient was improving,” says Dr. Thuy-Nga (Tia) Pham, Physician Lead at East Toronto Health Link.

We have only scratched the surface of HRM technology opportunities. For example, consider the benefits of receiving Telemedicine or Cancer Care Ontario reports directly into patient records. Discussions regarding these and other uses for HRM are already underway.

The eConsult Initiative

In addition to timely receipt of hospital reports, physicians are also challenged with timely access to specialist counsel that could reduce patient wait times. The eConsult initiative, currently in “proof of concept” pilot stage, provides physicians with the opportunity to electronically send a question to, and receive advice from, a specialist.

OntarioMD is working in collaboration on this initiative with many partners, including the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, eHealth Ontario, the Ontario Telemedicine Network eConsult service, the Champlain Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) Building Access to Specialists through eConsultation (BASE) eConsult service, and Toronto Central and Central LHINs — both of which are part of the FAST (Find A Specialist Today) network.

An eConsult may preclude the need to physically send a patient to a specialist following an initial encounter with a primary care provider by enabling the provider to electronically ask the specialist simple questions (e.g., rec-

ommended drug dosage) or complex questions (e.g., asking for a virtual dermatology assessment and providing images of the patient).

The Canadian Medical Protective Association (CMPA) has assessed the eConsult flow of care and determined that it provides an opportunity to improve efficiency, enhance patient care, expand access to specialists, and provide a clear, electronic audit trail between specialists and primary care providers.

Patient and system benefits associated with eConsult include:

- Patients receive more timely access to care (some problems can be treated without a face-to-face consultation).

Level	Criteria	Description
5	Population Impact	Supports population reporting, health management and planning at the provincial level.
4	Integrated Care	Sharing information and resources seamlessly across care teams at the regional level.
3	Advanced Disease Management Support	Enhancing patient-centred delivery and management of care.
2	Established Clinical Processes	Transforming clinical efficiency as the EMR becomes an asset.
1	Basic Record-Keeping	Streamlining foundational office administrative and clinical efficiency.
0	Paper-Based	Paper is the dominant means of storing, accessing and exchanging information.

- Improved patient-centred co-ordination of care between the primary care provider and specialist.
- Increased efficiencies by reducing unnecessary referrals, and avoiding travel and wait times.
- Improved equity of care with patients living in remote locations accessing specialist advice as easily as patients in urban areas.

(Please note: if you are a primary care physician interested in participating in the eConsult pilot, please contact econsult@ontariomd.com.)

The seamless transfer and integration of health care information from one source or system to another is underway with HRM and eConsult. A spectrum of clinical benefits will be unlocked when providers are using not only the core, but also the advanced functionality of the EMRs.

Many practitioners, even newly educated ones, have been provided with only cursory training in interconnected practice environments, data stewardship, epidemiology and population-based health.² OntarioMD is committed to bridging this knowledge gap, advancing interoperability and helping physicians balance practice responsibilities with advanced EMR use, to realize the full potential of EMRs to enhance care.

For more information on EPEP, HRM or eConsult, contact OntarioMD at 1.866.339.1233, email info@ontariomd.com, or visit ontariomd.ca. ■

Sarah Hutchison is the Chief Executive Officer of OntarioMD. Dr. Darren Larsen is the Chief Medical Information Officer at the OMA.

References

1. OntarioMD. Market share by funded physician. [Internet]. Toronto, ON: OntarioMD; c2014. [about 3 screens]. Available at: https://www.ontariomd.ca/portal/server.pt/community/emr_offerings/vendor_market_share/. Accessed: 2015 Apr 27.
2. Ellaway RH, Graves L, Greene PS. Medical education in an electronic health record-mediated world. *Med Teach*. 2013 Apr;35(4):282-6.

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