



OntarioMD Case Study:

Harnessing the power of EMRs for effective cancer care follow-up

THE CHALLENGE

Cancer care follow-up in Ontario is increasingly being embraced by primary care providers as part of comprehensive care delivery. During a stressful time in their lives, patients are tasked with navigating the transition from specialist care to primary care. Physician practices need to establish formalized processes that ensure high quality and evidence-based follow-up visits. These processes must meet current standards of care, be easy to update as needed to reflect new evidence, and integrate into busy practices – ideally without adding to the administrative burden physicians face.

With Canada's population continuing to age in the coming years, the number of new cancer cases is expected to grow. Developing a program for follow-up care of cancer patients can save lives.

Many physician's offices have programs in place that tap into the power of their electronic medical record (EMR) to monitor a range of conditions including cancer screening. However, similar programs often aren't in place to facilitate cancer survivor follow-up.

BACKGROUND

OntarioMD has been supporting community-based family physicians and specialists to implement and use EMRs since 2004. Over 14,000 Ontario physicians – more than the number of physicians using EMRs in all other Canadian provinces combined are using an EMR to care for more than 10 million Ontarians.

OntarioMD is building on that success by offering products and services designed to help practices optimize their EMR use. OntarioMD recognizes that clinicians need proper support to adopt new technologies, address changes to workflow, and become experienced users. With this in mind, we offer the Peer Leader Program, through which physicians, nurses and clinic managers can access the EMR expertise and support of their peers.

How your EMR and Peer Leader support can help

Dr. Mario Elia is a family physician from London, Ontario and adjunct professor in the Department of Family Medicine at Western University. He's also been an OntarioMD Physician Peer Leader since 2015. As a Physician Peer Leader, Dr. Elia has been able to support his fellow physicians by sharing his own successes with EMRs and helping to develop plans that lead to tangible practice improvements.

In his work advising physicians on using their EMR for effective cancer care follow-up, Dr. Elia proposes a three-step framework that can be easily integrated into existing processes, and updated as needed.

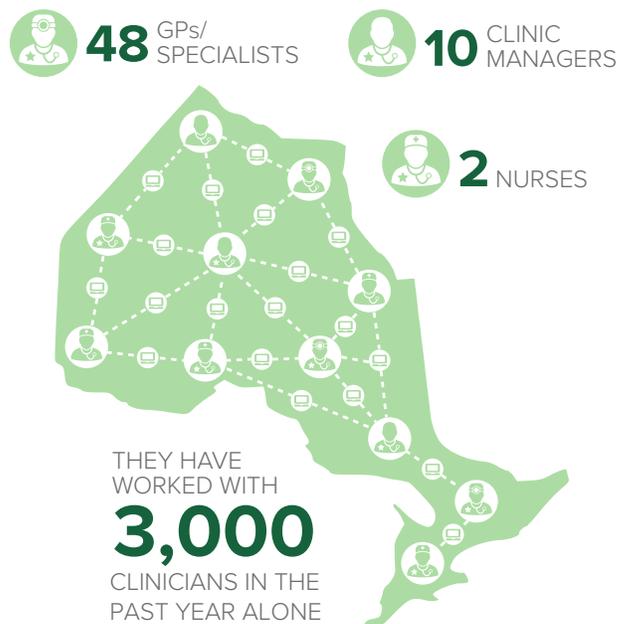
1. Determine which cancers to track: Dr. Elia suggests starting with several prevalent forms (for example, lung, breast, colorectal, prostate, bladder), and adding others as appropriate for your practice. Create standard terms with which to label each cancer in your EMR – such as “breast ca” for breast cancer, or link the diagnoses to an ICD-9, ICD-10 or SNOMED CT code. And, determine where this information should be entered. Then, create a glossary of these standards and make every EMR user in your practice aware of them, to ensure terms are entered uniformly for each patient.

2. Create a targeted database of patients: Search your EMR for patients who have been diagnosed with each type of cancer. This will require some time and creativity, as you'll need to think of every possible way you've labelled each cancer in the past (for example, you may have previously labelled colorectal cancer patients as “rectal ca”, or “ca colon”). Dr. Elia has a glossary of useful searches, which he shares with Peer Leader Program participants. As you find patients, make sure to re-label their record using your new standard cancer terms.

3. Determine appropriate follow-up processes: Identify follow-up requirements (imaging, bloodwork, annual check-up) for each type of cancer. Then, determine how you want to use the data in your EMR. You could take a passive approach by setting reminders that would show up on routine reports (prostate cancer patients who are due for a PSA test, for example). Or, you might actively search your patient database at regular intervals – such as monthly or annually – for follow-up indicators.

This framework holds immense benefits for your practice. In fact, it can be repeated for pre-cancerous conditions, which is another important group for follow-up. But the set-up process can be a lot of work. Rather than attempting to do it all at once, establish a project plan, and delegate tasks among physicians or other team members in your office.

OntarioMD's Peer Leader team includes



What Ontario's physicians are saying

"I really appreciated Dr. Elia's knowledge and ability to relay relevant and practical information."

Dr. Henry Ho

Family Physician, Yonge Sheppard Medical

"Dr. Elia was thorough, taught at a pace I could digest, and gave me tricks and tips that were practical."

Dr. Cathy Faulds

Family Physician, London Family Health Team

Contact

If you'd like to request the advice of a Peer Leader to learn how to leverage your certified EMR cancer care follow-up or other practice improvements, please contact the OntarioMD Peer Leader Program at peer.leader.program@ontariomd.com or click [here](#) to request a Peer Leader.

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