

Get To Know Your OntarioMD Peer Leader

OntarioMD Peer Leader Program marks five-year anniversary:

from “getting to good” to “getting to great” — advancing the usage, benefits of electronic medical records

by Darren Larsen, MD

IN 2007, MY SIX-PHYSICIAN FAMILY MEDICINE CLINIC IN THORNHILL UNDERWENT A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION FROM PAPER TO DIGITAL RECORDS. WE DID THIS WITH MINIMAL SUPPORT OR BEST-PRACTICE KNOWLEDGE, AS THERE WAS LITTLE AVAILABLE AT THE TIME.

After dealing with 50-plus years of patient records stored in the attic at our office, we decided it was a good idea to explore the EMR vendor landscape and offerings available to doctors in an attempt to modernize and upgrade our files and better capture quality patient information.

Having said that, the EMR implementation went very smoothly. Because of my pioneering experience, I was approached by OntarioMD to consider taking part in a new program being launched by Canada Health Infoway (CHI) in which physicians from across the country were being recruited to act as “change champions” in CHI’s overarching plan to promote EMR adoption nationally. Thus, the eHealth Ontario/OntarioMD Peer Leader Program was born.

Five years ago, there were nine Physician Peer Leads in the province. We were given the task of working with groups that were in various stages of EMR implementation, helping them “get going” in a variety of practice settings, from moderately sized clinics to large academic teaching centres.

The program grew gradually to 15 Physician Peer Leads in 2009. That

same year, the EMR adoption program was more than doubled to fund a total of approximately 9,000 physicians across Ontario. To support these new physician adopters, as well as existing ones, the Physician Peer group increased to 30 doctors. Our goal expanded from providing basic guidance to more advanced advice, so we could help clinics to not only “get going” but to also “get good.”

Peer Leads into the fold. These professionals have been invaluable in offering detailed advice to clinics from the business and practice management point of view.

Peer Leaders were complemented with an expanded OntarioMD field team of Practice Management Consultants, eAdvisory Consultants and Project Managers, and the introduction of a

Peer Leaders have gone from being pioneers to experts in a variety of matters related to EMR adoption and health information technology.

“The (Peer Leader) sessions sped up the learning curve and helped ease the pain of moving to an EMR from a paper-based office. We would definitely recommend Peer Leaders to other Physicians or Practices.”

— Keele Medical Family Health Group

We recognized that physicians’ staff were also key to gaining widespread EMR adoption and use, and we sought out and brought 14 Office Management

new EMR Maturity Model (EMM). The EMM defined gaps in how a clinic used its EMR, and provided a tailored change management process to help fill these gaps.

Missing from the mix, however, was a cadre of nurses working in the primary care setting. Since nurses and nurse practitioners are such vital components in a collaborative care team, and interact with EMRs regularly in offices of all sizes, a new partnership was forged

with the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario to recruit and add a group of 25 Nursing Peer Leads to our circle.

This new addition strengthens the multidisciplinary approach we are now taking to advancing the use of EMRs, which includes everyone from hesitant adopters to long-time mature users, and encourages the spread of best practices in comprehensive care groups and complex work environments. This completed our Peer Leader offering and expanded our goal from "getting to good" to "getting to great."

Peer Leaders have gone from being early pioneers to change management gurus, and now to experts in a variety of matters related to EMR adoption and health information technology. It is good to know that this group of devoted and talented Peer Leaders has a voice at virtually every project going forward in the eHealth sphere.

Despite sitting at many tables helping to drive the shared agenda of moving toward a provincial electronic health record and improved connectivity, the basis of Peer Leader work is still very much like the core work of clinicians, and that is being on the ground with our "patients" to enable their greater health, — in this case, eHealth!

"Practical assistance to make better use of EMR was invaluable, and I would certainly recommend Peer Leaders to other Practices."

— Dr. David Tannenbaum, Lead Physician, Mount Sinai Academic Family Health Team

It has been a privilege to evolve in this arena with my Peer Leads at OntarioMD and the partners who support us. Considering where we started five years ago and the progress we have made, it is mind-boggling to consider where we will be five years from now!

If you would like the assistance of a Peer Leader in any stage of your EMR journey from pre-selection to meaningful use, please do not hesitate to ask for our help. Simply write to us at info@ontarioMD.com, or call OntarioMD at 1.866.339.1233, and we will be there to help you! ■

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