

MEDIA RELEASE

Technology is Helping Northerners Connect with Specialist Care Closer to Home

October 24, 2017 – A pilot program that makes it easier for primary care providers to get advice from medical specialists anywhere in Ontario is paying dividends for medical practitioners and patients in the North East Local Health Integration Network (North East LHIN).

The Provincial eConsult Initiative enables physicians and nurse practitioners to engage in a secure, electronic dialogue with specialists to manage patient care, without the need for a patient visit with the specialist.

“The eConsult system is a great example of how technology can improve the patient experience,” said Tamara Shewciw, Chief Information Officer at the North East LHIN. “For patients, it’s helping reduce the expense and stress associated with travel, while for physicians, it’s a way to get answers faster and reduce unnecessary referrals.”

The Provincial eConsult initiative, a project within the Digital Health Strategy, is delivered through a strong partnership between Champlain BASE, the Ontario Telemedicine Network and OntarioMD. According to statistics from OntarioMD, about 1,300 eConsult requests were made between January 2015 and July 2017 by physicians and nurse practitioners working in the North East LHIN — the highest usage of the 12 LHINs participating in the program.

An eConsult occurs when a family physician or nurse practitioner electronically sends a question to a medical specialist. eConsults can deal with both simple and complex questions and typically follow an initial assessment or check-up of the patient performed by the requesting physician or nurse practitioner.



Dr. James Chau (left) works with the North East Specialized Geriatric Centre and has been an enthusiastic early adopter of the eConsult system. Also pictured (left to right) are Dr. Jo-Anne Clarke, Dr. Susan Lane, and Valerie Scarfone, Executive Director of the NESGC.

Dr. James Chau is a Care of the Elderly Physician who works with the North East Specialized Geriatric Centre in Sudbury. He is a regular user of eConsult, both as a requester and as a respondent to inquiries himself as a specialist.

“Using eConsult reduces travel and waiting times for a specialist opinion, which traditionally has been a real challenge for individuals living in the more rural areas of Northeastern Ontario,” said Dr. Chau. “Specifically for frail elderly patients, it can save patients and their caregivers from having to attend additional appointments or consultations if clinical questions can be addressed via an eConsult.”

More than 100 specialties are accessible through eConsult. Common specialties requested by North East LHIN physicians include: obstetrics, endocrinology, and pediatrics. The average time for an eConsult request is just over 2 days, and the turnaround time can also be as little as four hours.

Dr. Chau is impressed with how platform has been embraced by healthcare professionals across the region. “I’ve found it encouraging and impressive to see the number of North East LHIN specialists who are engaged with the eConsult system and are readily sharing their expertise with colleagues across the province,” said Dr. Chau.

At the North East LHIN, the use of enabling technologies is a priority area. Currently, the LHIN is working with 24 hospitals in the region on the “ONE” project. This project will allow for a one patient, one record approach and for the development evidence-based standards of care for northern patients.

To learn about the Provincial eConsult Initiative or to sign up for eConsult, please visit: <https://www.ontariomd.ca/products-and-services/provincial-econsult-initiative>

To learn about how the North East LHIN is using enabling technologies to improve patient care and access, please visit: <http://www.nelhin.on.ca/enablingtechnologies.aspx>

-30-

For more information: contact Michael Ward, North East LHIN Communications Officer, at 705-256-3002 or michael.ward@lhins.on.ca.