

Primary Health Care

Physician Supply: What is the Relationship with Health Outcomes?

Responding to the Canadian Medical Association's "[More Doctors, More Care](#)" campaign which seeks to increase physician supply targets to align with the [OECD](#) (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) average, a recent article noted that [health care outcomes in Canada are similar or better](#) than countries with more physicians per capita. The authors suggested this may be partly due to Canada's high generalist-to-specialist physician ratio. They also noted a recent working paper that found areas in Canada with a [higher concentration of family physicians have higher levels of health](#), while areas with a higher concentration of specialists have lower levels of health.

Chronic Disease Prevention and Management

Current Research Contributing to the Literature on Chronic Disease and Children

Survey data from the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada's 2009 [Report on the Health of Ontario's Kids](#) suggested that children in Ontario are at risk of developing chronic conditions because of a lack of physical activity and poor eating habits. Studies by the [Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences \(ICES\)](#) have found that Ontario has one of the [highest rates](#) of childhood-onset inflammatory bowel diseases in the world and that between 1994 and 2004 there was an increase of approximately [three per cent annually](#) in the rate of diabetes in children of all ages in Ontario. Guidelines produced by the [European Society of Hypertension](#) have been released for the management of [high blood pressure in children and adolescents](#).

Mental Health and Addictions

Online Tools, Patient Conversations and Services: Impact on Mental Health and Addictions?

Recent work from the [Health Strategy Innovation Cell](#) has highlighted the power of the Internet for health conditions including mental health and addictions. An analysis of the World Wide Web's 50 most popular health-related English-language blogs – self-published, ongoing "dialogues" – concluded that they can be [positive tools](#) for consumers and health professionals: they are cathartic, gaining increasing clinical relevance, and enjoy good governance. A *Longwoods Essay* pointed to services such as Twitter™ as potential tools for [real-time analysis](#) of mood disorder surveillance such as depression. Another study found the 12th most popular MySpace™ community [focused on depression in 2007](#) and on Facebook™ there were over 21,000 members for one suicide awareness and prevention community. Among these popular communities, high-stigma illnesses such as bipolar disorder and HIV/AIDS ranked highest in frequency and intensity of use.

Note: Health Horizon newsletter draws on current research from peer-reviewed journals; you may need to obtain some of the articles referenced in Health Horizon through the MOHLTC Journal Access Centre or by purchasing them. For assistance with obtaining articles please contact the Health Horizon Staff Lead, Uyen Quach at uyen.quach@ontario.ca, tel. (416) 327-7657

Public Health

Research on Alcohol-Related Harm

CIHI's 2008 *Major Injury in Ontario* report, which looked at 4,354 hospitalizations for major trauma in Ontario's 11 designated trauma facilities in 2007–2008, showed that alcohol was involved in at least [12% of major trauma cases](#). Another study has suggested that the costs associated with alcohol amount to more than [one per cent of the gross national product](#) in high-income and middle-income countries. A [recent Cochrane review](#) concluded that web/internet feedback (WF) and individual face-to-face feedback (IFF) interventions are probably effective in reducing alcohol misuse in young people. Another paper also reviewed the evidence for the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of policies and programmes to reduce the [harm caused by alcohol](#).

Institutional Care/Sectors

What is the Impact of Hospitalists?

An American study assessing whether there is a link between hospitalists - physicians whose primary professional focus is the general medical care of hospitalized patients- and performance on hospital-level quality indicators concluded that hospitals with hospitalists were associated with [better performance](#) for some conditions and dimensions of care. Hospitalists have also been found to be, on average, [more efficient diagnosticians](#) and/or enhance throughput (i.e., having lower charges through reductions in testing and length of stay) than teaching teams. A previous review found general agreement that hospitalist care leads to shorter lengths of stay and [lower cost per stay](#).

World at a Glance



Canada

Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide: Developments in Canada

Although Canada has not adopted legislation permitting or decriminalizing euthanasia or physician-assisted suicides (PAS), recent developments in Canada including a discussion paper expected to be released in November by the [Collège des médecins du Québec](#) task force on ethics and Bill C-384 [may encourage the debate](#) in the country. Current global research on PAS have looked at the relation between the care provided in the final three months of life and the prevalence and [types of end of life decisions](#) as well as [doctors' opinions](#) of legalizing PAS.



United States

Priorities Proposed for Comparative Effectiveness Research (CER)

In response to the new national investment in CER, the [Institute of Medicine](#) has recently released [a list of priority topics](#). Examples in the highest priority group include comparing comprehensive care coordination programs (e.g., medical homes) versus usual care in managing children and adults with severe chronic disease, especially in populations with known health disparities. However, the question of whether CER will contribute to [more affordable health care](#) in the US has also been raised in a recent Commentary in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.



United Kingdom

Quality Care and Fiscal Constraints: Challenges for the NHS?

A focus on achieving quality care while reducing costs in the NHS is reflected in two recent reports from the UK. [The King's Fund](#) with the [Institute for Fiscal Studies'](#) report presents three future funding scenarios for the English NHS and their consequences for 2011 to 2017. Under the worst funding scenario, the funding gap is projected to be nearly [£40 billion at 2010/11 prices by 2017](#). A [Health Foundation](#) report looking at whether quality improvements addressed financial pressures concluded that changes would require designing and testing the finance, measurement and support systems that could [create incentives](#) and enablers to use improvement changes and methods.



Rwanda

Home Medical Visits: Improving Health in Resource-Poor Areas?

In rural Rwanda, doctors, nurses, and villagers have teamed up with Boston-based [Partners in Health](#) and the Rwandan government to deliver medicine and medical counseling door-to-door. The US Public Broadcasting Service reporting suggests that the Rwandan initiative resulted [improvements in health](#) while also stimulating the economy. Other studies looking at postnatal home visits and community health worker home visits in Bangladesh and South Africa have also reported positive findings such as [lower neonatal mortality](#) and high levels of [repeated attendance \(>75%\)](#) achieved at scheduled screening appointments.



European Union

Alzheimer Disease and other Dementias

A global prevalence study of dementia released by [Alzheimer's Disease International](#) estimates 65.7 million people in 2030 and [115.4 million in 2050](#) people worldwide will be living with dementia. The European Commission has recently adopted a *Communication* to support national efforts in [four key areas](#): prevention and early diagnosis, coordinating research across Europe, sharing best practices and developing a European network for rights and dignity of people with dementia.

Focus on Patient-Centred Care, Quality Improvements and Cost

Highlight

New Feature: In the Blogosphere

Health-related blogs have increasingly become a means to communicate and share timely health information, news, and developments. Future *Health Horizon* newsletters will highlight some of the topics being discussed in the health care blogosphere. Below are examples of some popular health blogs.

[The Health Care Blog](#) (THCB):

According to the website, by October 2008, THCB received over 80,000 visits. It prints original material from many contributors and reprints (by permission) posts from other bloggers.

[Health Affairs blogs](#): The health policy journal has entered the blogosphere as a new means of engaging readers in the health policy debate. The blogs are written by staff and “contributing voices” including those from leading researchers and medical practitioners.

[Wall Street Journal \(WSJ\) Health Blog](#): Wall Street Journal editors and reporters provide real-time news and analysis around the clock on WSJ blogs, with outside experts chosen by WSJ also contributing.

[Weighty Matters](#):

Dr. Yoni Freedhoff, founder of Ottawa’s [Bariatric Medical Institute](#) provides his personal perspective on a variety of health-related topics. His blog was the recipient of Canada’s top health blog of 2008 by the [Canadian Blog Awards](#).

[KevinMD.com](#):

Dr. Kevin Pho, a primary care doctor board certified in Internal Medicine in the US has over 20,000 RSS subscribers and 15,000 Twitter followers.

[Diabetes Mine](#):

Amy Tenderich, an American journalist diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes in 2003 runs a blog targeted to those living with diabetes. The blog notably holds the annual, online [Diabetes Mine™ Design Challenge](#) to encourage creative new tools for improving life with diabetes.

Patient-Centred Care (PCC): Introduction

Patient-centred care, sometimes expanded to “person-centred care”, is increasingly being adopted as a means to plan, deliver and evaluate health care. According to the [Picker Institute](#), PCC encompasses respect for people’s values, preferences, and expressed needs; coordination and integration of care; information, communication and education; physical comfort; emotional support and alleviation of fear and anxiety; involvement of family and friends; transition and continuity; and access to care. The [Institute of Medicine \(IOM\)](#) and [International Alliance of Patients’ Organizations](#) also define PCC similarly. Notably, PCC was the top health trend identified in the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care’s annual [Externally-Informed Health Systems Trends Report](#).

This issue of the Health Horizon newsletter provides illustrative examples of PCC approaches and some detail on three PCC-related innovations: decision aids, consumer-directed health plans and patient-centred medical homes.

Jurisdictional Examples

Many organizations including governments, health care organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other health-related actors are adopting PCC-based approaches to address a variety of objectives that range from broad system goals to initiatives targeted at individuals. Some of the examples below have also been evaluated in the research literature.

Canada: The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care’s [Aging at Home Strategy](#) is one example of a PCC approach. The \$1.1 billion (over four years) initiative is designed to allow seniors to live healthy, independent lives in the comfort and dignity of their own homes. Additionally, at Ontario’s Cardiac Care Network, [Regional Cardiac Care Coordinators](#) provide options and knowledge of the closest centre with the shortest wait time for individuals. In British Columbia, [Self-Management Programs](#) for chronic disease such as diabetes are being delivered through lay-led education programs in community settings.

The Commonwealth: In 2000, the UK released [The NHS Plan – A Plan for Investment, A Plan for Reform](#) that outlined a vision of health services designed around the patient. The UK NHS website, [NHS Choices](#), is one example of this move to PCC. Another example developed by the [National Health Service Institute for Innovation and Improvement](#) is the UK’s [Productive Ward - Releasing Time to Care program](#) which aims to free up caregivers’ time for more direct patient care in acute care nursing units. Self-reported data for the Productive Ward program shows that it improved the amount of time spent on direct care by [20%](#). The New Zealand Ministry of Health has also introduced the program to its [District Health Boards](#). In Australia, a cluster randomized comparison between person-centred care, dementia-mapping and usual care with agitation as the primary outcome found that [agitation was lower](#) at sites providing person-centred care and dementia mapping.

United States (US): Preliminary analysis of Kaiser Permanente’s [HealthConnect](#), a comprehensive health information system, found it [created operational efficiencies](#) by offering non-traditional, patient-centered ways of providing care in the ambulatory setting. PCC also is key to the Institute for Healthcare Improvement’s [“Triple Aim”](#) initiative to reform health care, which simultaneously focuses on the health of a defined population, experience of care for individuals in this population, and cost per capita of providing care for this population to improve.

NGOs: [The Planetree Organization](#) and [The Institute for Family-Centered Care \(IFCC\)](#) are two examples of NGOs actively promoting patient-centred care. Members of Planetree include Canadian facilities such as [Jewish Elder Care Centre](#) and [Centre de réadaptation Estrie](#) which are both in Quebec.

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Decision Aids (DAs): Providing Information, Communication and Education?

As a component of [shared decision-making](#) DAs are evidence-based tools designed to improve communication between physicians and patients by involving patients in decisions about their health care. An updated [systematic review on DAs](#) for people facing difficult treatment or screening decisions found that they improve people's knowledge of options, create accurate risk perceptions of their benefits and harms, reduce difficulty with decision-making, and increase participation in the process. In terms of specific health conditions, a review of cancer-related DAs found them effective in increasing patient knowledge [without increasing anxiety](#). Preliminary evidence from *Statin Choice*, study of a DA to help patients with diabetes decide about statins, suggested that DAs do not have a negative impact on trust in the physician and [may increase trust](#) through improvements in the decision-making process. Despite the positive findings for DAs identified here, a 2008 [review](#) concluded that few studies provide assessment of the impact of DAs on health outcomes, quality of care, utilization, or costs.

Consumer-Directed Health Plans (CDHPs): Promoting Preferences and Awareness of Costs?

Common in the US, a typical CDHP is a high deductible insurance plan combined with either a Health Savings Account or a Health Reimbursement Account. CDHPs aim to encourage consumers to participate in their care decisions. Results from studies of CDHPs are mixed. Findings from a study comparing CDHP members with chronic diseases with a matched comparison group of preferred provider organization plan members concluded that although CDHPs resulted in lower utilization, it also resulted in lower medication adherence, making it [unclear whether the reduction in utilization is appropriate](#). In contrast, research focusing on appropriate management of chronic conditions by comparing 11 [Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set](#) measures between CDHPs and comprehensive major medical plan members found that CDHP members utilize chronic care services at a [similar or higher rate](#) than the other group for all but one utilization measure (i.e., persistent medication management). One study found that CDHP members had [limited knowledge](#) about their deductible plans, and needed more knowledge to make informed decisions about costs, quality, necessary, discretionary and unnecessary care.

Patient-Centred Medical Homes (PCMH): Co-ordination, Integration and Access?

PCMH is a comprehensive health care delivery model based on a [set of principles](#) including whole person-orientation, coordinated and integrated care, enhanced access, quality and safety, and payment reform. A prospective before and after evaluation of PCMH demonstration project at [Group Health Cooperative](#), a large, non-profit integrated delivery system in the US, found that compared with controls, PCMH patients reported significantly [better care experiences](#) for care coordination, access, patient activation and involvement. A number of [medical home demonstration projects](#) are currently underway in the US. In terms of cost, a recent [overview of PCMH](#) found that the PCMH model is associated with improved outcomes and lower overall costs of care, likely due to increased access to the type of primary care services promoted by PCMH. The Commonwealth Fund has estimated that [\\$194 billion USD](#) could be saved over 10 years by assigning each Medicare beneficiary to a medical home.

Conclusions

Overall, the PCC movement appears to be gaining momentum. It is present in current government initiatives, innovative tools, novel incentive mechanisms, and new modes of service delivery. However, some concerns regarding [poor conceptualization of PCC](#) and a [lack of a clear method of measurement](#) have been raised, and the literature does note that more empirical research is needed to determine costs and outcomes along a number of dimensions.

Selection of recent Cochrane Reviews

Feature:

All Canadians now have full access to the Cochrane Library at:

www.thecochranelibrary.com

[Long-term effects of weight-reducing drugs in hypertensive patients](#)

Upcoming conferences/events

Ontario Hospital Association:

[HealthAchieve 2009](#)

Toronto, Ontario

November 16-18, 2009

The National Aboriginal Health

Organization: [Our People – Our Health](#)

Ottawa, Ontario

November 24-26, 2009

Interesting links

[The H1N1 Flu in Ontario: A Report by Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health](#)

[The Change Foundation's *Having Their Say, Choosing Their Way: More information available on this project by October 29, 2009*](#)

[PubMed's Redesigned Website](#)

[Health Strategy Innovation Cell: The Global Accelerator Award](#)

[Ontario Health Technology Assessment Series](#)

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