

BRIGHT LIGHTS AWARDS



2015

Population-Based Primary Health Care: Planning and integration for the community Guelph Family Health Team

Successful Implementation of a Caring Community Model



Improvements to population health don't take place in isolation; they require engagement and collaboration with community partners. For the Guelph Family Health Team, this commitment meant embracing the province's Health Links program, but modifying it to meet the needs of the local population.

Health Links are networks of care organizations that work together to provide more seamless care for individual patients as they move through the healthcare system, starting with the patients who use the system most frequently, such as people with chronic conditions. The program is designed to facilitate co-ordination of care and contain costs.

The Guelph FHT has implemented an innovative Caring Community Model for its Health Link, expanding eligibility for treatment to include the most vulnerable members of the local population, such as the frail elderly. To identify these individuals in need, the team believes that formal and informal relationships are essential. The FHT has forged partnerships with community organizations, including the police, the public library and the local banks. The partners work together to reach potentially vulnerable individuals before they need medical intervention.

The numbers attest to their success. Team members have implemented more than 1,800 co-ordinated care plans for Guelph's vulnerable citizens and have seen such successes as better stability levels among their target population and fewer visits to the emergency department.

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The team has been at the forefront of the development of Health Links. It continually reviews its processes and has revised them as it identifies gaps or issues. Since the Caring Community Model was implemented, the team has revolutionized care by using the Internet to provide patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD) access to remote coaching. The FHT has developed links with community pharmacies who can alert them to any concerns they have about individual clients.

The success of the Caring Community Model is bringing the FHT recognition throughout Canada. Guelph Health Link has provided advice to 15 other Ontario Health Links about identifying members based on need, rather than service cost and about the necessity of engaging primary healthcare providers. They have offered input on the critical role that socio-economic factors play in an individual's well-being and the value of working with partners outside the healthcare system, such as food banks and seniors centres.

The Guelph FHT has shared the details of its program and processes through presentations for the Ontario Hospital Association and AFHTO, among others. In addition, the FHT actively contributes to both regional LHIN policy and provincial policy. The Guelph FHT has successfully demonstrated that connections among community members are both valuable and necessary in improving the health of the population.