

Engaging patients in their care through a secure internet portal

AFHTO, Engaging Patients Through Portals: Tools & Tales

October 15, 2014

Disclosure

- **Presenter:** Dr. David Verrilli
- **Potential for conflict of interest:**
 - Dr. Verrilli received free use of Wellx for 6 months (during a pilot period) from Healthcare Made Simple Inc.

Objectives

- Understand the technology including compliance with privacy legislation
- Describe how VFHT and its patients use the technology to engage patients in their own care
- Develop ideas about how this tool could be used in your team and with your patients

Background

- **Village FHT**, established Sept 2011
- Initially 3 physicians, 1 RN, 1 ED, 1 admin
- Growth to:
 - 9 physicians
 - 2 RN
 - 1 NP
 - 1 SW
 - 1 ED
 - 5 admin/clerical
 - part-time chiropody and RD
 - psychiatry on site



Technology

- Wellx is a secure website and mobile app for doctor-patient communication (now team-patient communication)
- Allows 1-to-1 email-like messaging with PCP and also collaboration with team
- Used for:
 - answering non-urgent questions
 - sharing non-critical results
 - sending broadcast announcements to all patients e.g. flu shot clinic information
 - Sending appointment notification info to patients
- At Village FHT, Wellx was initially implemented with myself and NP in summer 2012; rest of team joined on in Dec 2012

Security & Privacy



- potential risks with email communication:
 - privacy and security
 - timeliness of response
 - clarity of communication
- Wellx uses industry-standard (128-bit SSL) end-to-end encryption
- Terms of use must be accepted by patient, and if followed minimize risk above
- Message content can only be viewed by login with password

Welcome screen

Dr. David Verrilli

(416) 599-8348 · Toronto, ON

Wellx is the easy, secure and free way to communicate with your doctor online.

To connect with Dr. David Verrilli, create a free Wellx account:

First name

Last name

Birthday:

Year ↓ ↑ Month ↓ ↑ Day ↓ ↑

Gender: Female Male

Providing your birthday and gender helps your healthcare provider send you relevant health information and reminders



Upload profile picture...

For best results, choose a clear, square picture of your face

Email

Your email is used to sign in to Wellx and to notify you about new messages

Password

Acceptable Use

GENERAL

[Privacy Policy](#)

PATIENTS

[Terms of Use](#)

[Acceptable Use](#)

HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

[Terms of Use](#)

[Account Recovery](#)

Acceptable Use Policy

Updated June 12, 2012

Using online messaging to communicate with your doctor and other healthcare providers can help to improve your care. However, there are also risks involved in relying on online messaging. Using online messaging appropriately can reduce these risks.

By using Wellx to communicate with your healthcare providers, you agree that you understand and will abide by the following conditions:

- **If you require immediate assistance or if your condition appears serious or rapidly worsens, do not use Wellx.** Call or visit your healthcare provider's office for consultation, or take other measures as appropriate (e.g., calling 911).
- Your healthcare providers can not guarantee that any particular message will be read and responded to within any particular period of time.
- If you do not receive an immediate response, do not send multiple messages on the same subject. This will only make it harder for your healthcare provider to respond in a timely fashion.
- Online communication is not an appropriate substitute for clinical examinations. You are responsible for following up on your healthcare provider's messages and for scheduling appointments where warranted.
- If your message requires or invites a response from your healthcare provider and you have not received a response within a reasonable time period, it is your responsibility to follow up.
- Your healthcare providers may refuse to discuss sensitive medical information through Wellx. If there are specific types of information that you do not want to discuss through Wellx, it is your responsibility to inform your healthcare provider.
- To manage and respond to your messages, your healthcare provider may forward those messages to their staff and other members of their team. However, your messages will not be forwarded to third parties without your consent, except as authorized or required by law.

CMPPA Electronic Records Handbook

“At least one provincial privacy commissioner has indicated that physicians should avoid communicating personal health information via email unless the email service is secure and offers strong encryption. The commissioner has further indicated that it would be inappropriate to rely on patient consent to waive the protection afforded by encryption and other security measures.”


CPSO Policy Statement: Confidentiality of PHI

- “The College strongly advises that physicians obtain patient consent to use electronic means for communicating personal health information. As part of obtaining consent, physician must explain to patients the inherent risks of using this form of communication.”

Case example 1: results

- 41 year old man, complaint of prostate symptoms
- After appointment he was sent for blood and urine tests

DV You wrote to [redacted] 12 days ago:
Hi Richard,
Both urine tests were normal. No chemical abnormalities in the urine, and nothing to suggest infection. I will still go ahead with referral to a urologist.
Read by Richard 12 days ago

 [redacted] replied 12 days ago:
Thank you! I like this Wellx system.

DV You replied 6 minutes ago:
I've sent the request to Dr. Llano at Mount Sinai - he specializes in prostate problems.
If you do not hear from my office within 2 weeks with appointment details, please get in touch with me.
Unread by Richard · Edit · Delete

Case example 2: triage/advice

- 23 year old man initiates conversation

CB [redacted] wrote to Dr. David Verrilli on Aug 28, 2014 at 8:34 pm:

Hey Dr. Verrilli,

First time using this nifty tool...

I started to develop a sore throat or maybe even tonsillitis (I hope not) this afternoon. It's not impossible to swallow, but when I do, I feel a little bit of discomfort. Otherwise it just feels a little raw or inflamed when I'm not moving my mouth. I checked my mouth out in the mirror and my tonsils definitely look larger and more red.

I took some oil of oregano to help out with the swelling, but that's pretty much it. Anything else you'd advise?

Think I can come in for a check-up tomorrow? Anytime would work, it's a lazy day at work.

I'm going to see how I feel when I wake up tomorrow morning.

Talk soon,

[redacted]

DV You replied on Aug 29, 2014 at 9:20 am:

Hi [redacted],

If the sore throat is on the milder side, and you do not have fever or feel sick, I would just monitor things for now. Drink lots of fluids. You can use lozenges or Advil for pain.

I do not work at the family health team on Fridays, but if things are worse tomorrow, you could walk-in as we run an urgent care clinic on Saturday mornings. You would be able to see one of my colleagues tomorrow before noon.

Read by [redacted] a month ago

CB [redacted] replied on Aug 29, 2014 at 10:12 am:

Thanks! I'll grab some lozenges from Shopper's. If it gets any worse I'll pop in Saturday.

Case example 3: follow-up

- 1 y.o. boy with slight bowing of legs while walking
- I needed time to research and refresh on this issue

TDA

[REDACTED] wrote to Dr. David Verrilli on Aug 17, 2014 at 8:10 am:

Hi, just wondering if you were able to look into finding out if Maks needed to see someone about his little bit of bow legs.

DV

You replied on Sep 1, 2014 at 9:06 am:

Hi **[REDACTED]**,

Sorry for the delay getting back to you. I was on holiday and it's taking me some time to catch up on all my messages.

I've done some more reading about infant/toddler bowleg and I actually don't think any intervention is necessary right now unless Max's issue is becoming worse. This issue is actually more common than I thought in little kids, but it almost always corrects itself with time. It could even be considered a normal variant for children under age 2. At the last visit, Max's bowleg was quite subtle.

I think it makes more sense to continue monitoring Max over the next 6-12 months. What we will likely see is improvement over time - that his legs will appear more straight as he grows and his leg muscles strengthen.

Are you continuing to give him vitamin D every day? This should continue for proper bone development. We will keep examining this over time at each of his visits, but only if things persist past 18 months, or if the appearance of bowleg is becoming more dramatic, would we consider x-rays, referrals and physiotherapy.

Again sorry for the delay writing to you! Let me know if you have any questions.

Read by **[REDACTED]** 2 months ago

Positive Impact for Patients

- Online communication improves access to providers
- Better access for patients too thanks to mobile app
- It can help patients feel more connected with their PCP
- It can avoid unnecessary appointments



Family Health Team

Stats for Dr. Verrilli

- 300 messages received in September 2014
- 275 messages sent in September 2014
- Weekly breakdown:
 - Sept 1 - Sept 7: 96 messages received, 87 messages sent
 - Sept 8 - Sept 15: 73 messages received, 67 messages sent
 - Sept 16 - Sept 22: 34 messages received, 22 messages sent
 - Sept 23 - Sept 29: 97 messages received, 99 messages sent
- Estimated time spent = 20 minutes per day