

BRIGHT LIGHTS AWARD


2014

**Accountability and governance for patient-centred care
Queen's Family Health Team**

**With patients, for patients:
A new kind of board of directors for a new kind of care**



In the traditional healthcare hierarchy, a board was about as far away from patients as it could be. If board members shared an elevator with patients on their way to a meeting, that was about the extent of interaction. Things have changed. The boards of family health teams and nurse practitioner-led clinics are responsible for the performance of all aspects of their organizations. This year, the Bright Lights Award for governance emphasized the board's role in anchoring everything teams do in patient-centred care. The winner is the Queen's Family Health Team.

The Queen's FHT board is made up almost entirely of members of the community, from patients to representatives of the organizations it works with. Its board works hard to work with patients — by including them on the board and in strategic and quality improvement planning. It creates structures to ensure patient voices are heard, such as encouraging the development of forums and other opportunities for patients and families to provide feedback, regular patient communications, regular patient surveys and inviting patients to meetings.

Because the university handles financial oversight for the FHT, the board is free to focus on just four areas: improving quality, building connections with its partners and patients, being accountable to its patients and the community, and managing change. Patient-centred care is a key measure in its quality improvement plan, and the board gets reports on patient-centred care and quality improvement at every meeting.

But the board doesn't just receive reports — it pushes further, by frankly discussing weaknesses in care and how to improve patient-centred care at every meeting. Leadership from the board launched the team's first quality improvement project in 2009. That resulted in a whole structure for improving quality, including regular patient surveys and collecting and reporting incidents and complaints.

To maintain its strong links to the community, the board regularly invites partners — including representatives of long-term care facilities, seniors' programs, and hospitals — to its meetings to discuss how they can work together to meet the needs of patients.

In addition to having patients on the board itself, the Queen's FHT ensures patients's experiences are integrated into advisory committee agendas, strategic planning and quality improvement projects. Patients are also invited to focus groups to talk about their experiences with the team's care. The Queen's team has won four previous Association of Family Health Teams of Ontario's Bright Lights Awards, and has been a leader in mentoring other family health teams in quality improvement approaches, including using the data from medical records effectively for improvement.