

BRIGHT LIGHTS AWARD


2012

Getting Data and Using it to Improve Care
Award Winner - Queen's Family Health Team

Data discipline is worth the effort



One of the hallmarks of high-quality healthcare is consistency — but achieving that can seem a remote goal when you can't even get people to fill in forms properly. The Queen's Family Health Team found out the hard way just how basic the pursuit of quality has to get when it launched a project in 2008 to improve the consistency of how all users of its electronic medical record enter data.

The Queen's team faced a particular challenge: as an academic family health team, 50 residents a year passed through its doors, an enormous turnover challenge on top of the 22 staff physicians, four nurse practitioners, five registered nurses, five registered practical nurses, social workers and others on the team. Preference for individual styles of entering notes initially outweighed the rewards of entering data properly. To overcome that, the team converted to a new electronic record and hired a wonderful data analyst to manage the shift. New medical directives and quality plans were written. There was lots of promotion of the proper way to do things, and judicious use of force functions to shape data.

Nevertheless, it took 18 months just to develop a list of all the patients with diabetes in the practice, who were identified by searching medication lists, billing codes, disease registries and the like. Summer students were hired to enter a diabetes code on files as a permanent identifier. Team members consider it the best first step they could have taken in shaping a functioning data base.

Today, that data base delivers many "one-click" reports. With solid data and ease of use, the team has been able to meet Ministry of Health preventive care goals in five areas: flu shots, Pap smears, mammograms, colorectal cancer screening and childhood immunizations and also developed robust, highly functional tracking mechanisms for people with diabetes.