

# BRIGHT LIGHTS AWARDS



## 2015

### Transforming patient' and caregivers' experience and health South East Toronto Family Health Team

## Patient Advisory Council: Looking to Patients for Guidance



Meeting patient needs is the priority for providers of primary healthcare services, so it's no accident that patients are also an excellent source of information about areas that need improvement.

The South East Toronto Family Health Team (SETFHT) had a goal of creating an exceptional patient experience and understood that two-way communication with the population it served was an important step in reaching this goal. As a result, the SETFHT was one of the first primary care teams in Ontario to develop a Patient Advisory Council (PAC).

The PAC's members report directly to the Board of Directors and provide feedback on the delivery of programs, the content of patient materials and the direction of SETFHT's objectives. To date, feedback from the council has resulted in an improved telephone appointment process and the addition of more processes by which patients can communicate with the members of their health care team.

Council members have served as co-designers of a patient experience survey; assisted in designing a survey for emergency department patients who could be treated elsewhere; and developed a presentation for the AFHTO 2014 and 2015 conferences to assist other FHTs in establishing similar advisory groups.

At its meetings, which take place four times a year, the council also reviews quality assurance progress, participates in projects and identifies new areas of patient concern that need to be addressed. For example, a couple of council members will contribute to the FHT's implementation of its new infection prevention and control program.

Creating the PAC did not happen overnight. There were processes to establish and resistance to change to overcome. The FHT established a recruitment process reaching out to both staff and patients as council members. During the past year, terms of reference were established and confirmed. The fledgling council also actively engaged with the FHT staff and physicians to offer advice about the patient/caregiver experience.

The council has received impressive recognition: it was named as one of the Change Foundation's 20 Faces of Change for 2015 and has been featured twice in the newsletter of the Healthcare Insurance Reciprocal of Canada in conjunction with promotions for patient engagement and experience.

The South East Toronto FHT's Patient Advisory Council has been generous in sharing its terms of reference and recruitment strategies with other primary care teams. It has also followed up its 2014 presentation to AFHTO conference attendees with a presentation in 2015 that focuses on lessons learned in establishing a patient advisory council, recruitment, roles and responsibilities and general patient engagement. Perhaps 2016 will see a new crop of patient advisory councils springing up across Ontario as a result.