

BRIGHT LIGHTS AWARD


2014

Engaging patients in their care
Alliston Family Health Team

Breathing easier with education and support



Today's patients and their families often want to be actively involved in their own care. That's a big shift from "doctor knows best," and many primary care teams are looking for innovative ways to help patients learn about their health and look after themselves.

The Alliston Family Health Team won a Bright Lights Award from the Association of Family Health Teams of Ontario for its approach to the important task of engaging patients in their care.

The Alliston team decided to focus on patients with lung disease so severe they kept returning to emergency and often wound up being admitted. The team was sure, with better understanding of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and lessons in self-care, many of those people could suffer less and be kept out of hospital.

Alliston's COPD and pulmonary rehabilitation program recruits patients newly discharged from hospital. It begins with intense coaching: education on COPD and smoking cessation. Working with team members, patients then develop a self-care action plan. It outlines steps they can take to control symptoms themselves, early on, rather than waiting until the crisis deepens and heading to the hospital.

Part of managing COPD is to know when problems are arising, so many patients are connected to Telehomecare, which teaches them how to monitor their vital signs and when to move to their action plan.

COPD makes breathing difficult, and many patients avoid exertion. But that just makes things worse — improving fitness is an important part of living with the disease. So when patients asked for it, an exercise program was added to the program; it's offered at a local gym.

The program is working well — since it began in 2012, the number of Alliston FHT patients being readmitted to hospital for COPD issues has dropped from 19 per cent to 8 per cent and new admissions have been cut in half.

This award also brings the Alliston FHT a \$3,000 education grant from Merck Canada.