

Partnering with patients to improve access to after-hours primary care

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THE PROBLEM

The St. Michael's Hospital Academic Family Health Team offers an after-hours care model that includes evening and weekend clinics (at rotating locations) and a phone number patients can call to consult with a doctor after hours.

We surveyed our patients, and found:

Only about 30-60% of our patients were aware of our clinic's after-hours options.

Of about 600 patients surveyed:

- **62%** knew we offered evening clinics
- **58%** knew we offered weekend clinics
- **35%** knew they could consult with a doctor by phone after hours
- **63%** reported that it was easy to access after-hours care at our team the last time they were sick

OUR RESPONSE

Step 1: We spoke with patients, to ask what they thought would work to improve awareness

Through conversations with 59 patients, we learned:

- Our after-hours structure (i.e. clinics at rotating locations) is not the problem – the barrier is indeed **awareness**
- Our **posters** advertising the clinics are confusing and ineffective
- Patients felt we were under-utilizing **email communication**

Step 2: We redesigned our posters, based on patient feedback

In our Step 1 conversations, our patients told us our existing posters were hard to read and understand, and that we should emphasize the phone option.

Step 3: We emailed our patients, advertising and explaining our after-hours care

In our Step 1 conversations, our patients encouraged us to email them more. We created a short message explaining our after-hours care options, and emailed it to 10,000 of our patients.

If you have an urgent health problem evenings, nights or weekends, WE CAN HELP YOU!!

At one of St. Michael's Hospital Academic Family Health Team Clinics

Monday evenings	5:00-8:00 p.m.	Health Centre at 80 Bond 80 Bond St. / Upper Level 416.864.3011
Tuesday evenings	5:00-8:00 p.m.	St. Lawrence Health Centre 140 The Esplanade 416.864.6000
Wednesday evenings	5:00-8:00 p.m.	Health Centre at 410 410 Sherbourne, 4 th floor 416.867.3728
Thursday evenings	5:00-8:00 p.m.	St. James Town Health Centre 410 Sherbourne, Main floor 416.864.3096
Saturday	9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. 1:00-4:00 p.m. Please arrive by 3:30 p.m.	St. James Town Health Centre 410 Sherbourne, Main floor 416.864.3096
NEW Sunday Effective Sept. 6, 2015	12:00 p.m.-4:00 p.m. Please arrive by 3:30 p.m.	Sumac Creek Health Centre 73 Regent Park Blvd. 3 rd floor 416.864.3022

Or, you can speak to the doctor on call:

1. Call St. Michael's Hospital Locating at 416.864.5431.
2. Tell the operator your name, the name of your doctor and the clinic you attend, and your telephone number.
3. Tell the operator you need to speak to the doctor on call.
4. Stay off the phone until the doctor calls. The doctor will call you back within 15 minutes.

In case of a life-threatening emergency, call 911 or go to the Emergency Department of the nearest hospital.

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Form No. 7230 Rev. Feb. 24, 2015

Our old poster

Family Health Team After-Hours Urgent Care

Family Health Team patients from ANY clinic can use ANY of these services for urgent care, without an appointment. It is safest to be seen by St. Michael's Family Health Team providers because they work with your family doctor and have access to your history.

Doctor-on-Call Phone Service

Need help after-hours? Call 416.864.5431

- Request to speak to the family doctor on call
- Provide your name, clinic doctor and phone number
- Stay off the phone and you will get a call back within 15 minutes from the doctor on call.

Evening and Weekend Urgent Care Clinics
Please arrive 30 minutes before the clinic closes

Monday	5 - 8 p.m.	Health Centre at 80 Bond 80 Bond St., upper level 416.864.3011
Tuesday	5 - 8 p.m.	St. Lawrence Health Centre 140 The Esplanade 416.864.6000
Wednesday	5 - 8 p.m.	Health Centre at 410 410 Sherbourne, 4 th floor 416.867.3728
Thursday	5 - 8 p.m.	St. James Town Health Centre 410 Sherbourne, main floor 416.864.3096
Friday	No evening clinic. Please use the Doctor-on-Call Phone Service (above).	
Saturday	9 a.m. - noon 1 - 4 p.m.	St. James Town Health Centre 410 Sherbourne, main floor 416.864.3096
Sunday	12 - 4 p.m.	Sumac Creek Health Centre 73 Regent Park Blvd. 3 rd floor 416.864.3022

In case of a life-threatening emergency, call 911 or go to the Emergency Department of the nearest hospital.

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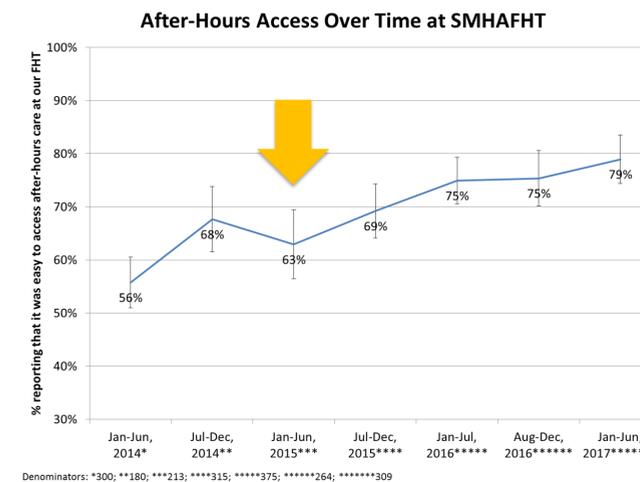
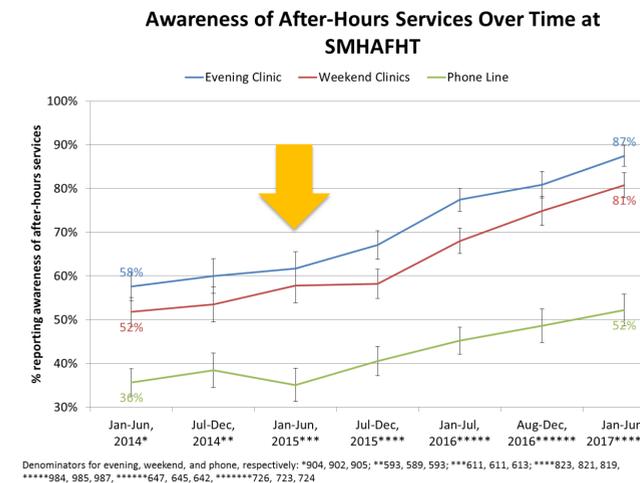
Our new, redesigned poster

THE RESULT

Our patients' suggestions were effective!

We redesigned the poster and emailed patients in June, 2015. Over the following two years, the number of patients who knew about our after-hours options increased steadily.

The ease of accessing our after-hours clinics also improved. In the twelve months following our interventions, the proportion of patients who reported that it was easy to access after-hours care increased by 12%. In two years, access increased by 16% percent.



REFLECTIONS

Patient engagement is compatible with the PDSA model

- This quality improvement initiative was a great example of the value of patient engagement.
- Sometimes, we hesitate to ask patients what they think, because we assume their suggestions will be too difficult to put into action.
- Yet time and again we find that our patients' suggestions are not only doable and inexpensive to implement, but also very effective.
- Without patient engagement, we wouldn't have guessed that our posters were ineffective. We had used a professional designer to create them, and they seemed clear enough from our perspective.
- We also wouldn't have known that our patients were okay with more email blasts. Our assumption was that email wouldn't be effective in reaching our senior and other vulnerable groups – yet in our conversations with patients, it was often those groups that suggested that we email them.
- It's likely that the surveys themselves (sent by email, asking our patients about their awareness of our after-hours care) were also effective in increasing awareness. If so, this would further confirm our patients' hypothesis that email communication is effective.

Unanticipated results

When we planned our project, we selected cost as a balancing measure. However, we realized that we should have also considered the resource implications of the potential increase in after-hours phone calls. Phone calls increased dramatically, and our residents struggled to meet the increased demand. It was a good reminder to carefully anticipate challenges that may come up if an intervention leads to change.

QUESTIONS? Contact Sam Davie at DavieS@smh.ca

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