

## Recruiting Patient/Family Representatives on Committees

### Introduction

Patient engagement and terms such as “patient and family-centred care” have become a common part of Ontario’s healthcare landscape and lexicon. Where patients used to be seen solely as recipients of care, research now shows that engaging patients and families directly in planning, design, and evaluation of health care services has a positive impact on the quality and safety of those services.

As a result, service providers across the health system are increasingly required to build patient (and family) engagement into their service planning and delivery:

- The new MOHLTC-FHT contract includes the goal of “providing population-based person-centred comprehensive primary care” and a requirement to “ensure patient and community input into its planning and priorities”,
- The Local Health Integration Networks require all funded health service providers to engage their communities, including patients, in planning and priority-setting decisions and increasingly are using patient experience as a measure of local system improvement,
- Accrediting bodies such as Accreditation Canada are including patient engagement in various aspects of organizational performance standards.

The most common approaches to patient and family engagement are 1) creating a dedicated patient/family advisory group or 2) including a patient/family representatives on committees along with broader membership.

The purpose of this document is to provide a brief overview of considerations and tips for patient participation in FHT/NPLC committees.

### Key Ingredients for Effective Patient Engagement

There are several common reasons why patient advisory positions or committees run into problems:

- the original intent of patient engagement is unclear, misunderstood or misaligned to the organization,
- the people chosen are not right for the job,
- there is a mismatch between what the person thought the committee would focus on and the actual topics coming before the committee,
- the patient representatives are not properly oriented or supported in their role, and
- the patient representatives feel their input is not valued or seriously considered.

The following sections address each of these common challenges.

### Confirm the Purpose

- Patient engagement can be interpreted in different ways and it is therefore important to begin with a clear and common understanding of why a patient is being asked to participate and how their input is expected to contribute to the committee.
- This needs not be a long document but rather a simple statement that puts in writing the FHT/NPLC's expectations and commitment.
- Where the FHT/NPLC already has organizational statements about patient involvement, patient engagement or patient-centredness (such as in the Mission, Vision or Values statements) these could be referenced. A statement of patient participation could also be incorporated into the committee's terms of reference.

### Clarify the Role

- The key step towards meaningful patient participation on a committee is to identify the qualifications for the job.
- In addition to having direct experience as a patient, look for people who are able to:
  - o share insights and information about their experiences so others learn from them,
  - o look at topics from beyond their own experience,
  - o consider and show concern for more than one issue, agenda or perspective,
  - o listen well and consider the experiences or points of view of others,
  - o speak comfortably in a group including with healthcare professionals, and
  - o be able to understand and commit to following conflict of interest and confidentiality requirements of the role.
- The committee should not be seen as place for a patient to bring their personal issues or grievances to be dealt with by the FHT/NPLC. Personal experiences are used only as examples when relevant to the topic being discussed.
- Put the role and responsibilities of the patient representative in writing as a companion document to the terms of reference for the committee and responsibilities of all committee members.

### Recruit the Right People

- To reach potential candidates:
  - o ask staff, non-staff clinicians and Board members (if appropriate) for suggestions,
  - o ask community partners or other community organizations to suggest candidates or post a recruitment notice (note: if the patient representative needs to be a FHT/NPLC patient make that clear),
  - o post a notice for the position in all FHT/NPLC location(s), and
  - o put notices in FHT/NPLC publications.

- Make the role description, terms of reference and any other committee information available to anyone interested. Ensure it is clear what topics the committee is expected to be dealing with.
- Ask candidates to submit a short statement of why they are interested and the skills and experience they could bring to the role.
- Review submissions and identify a short list if more than a few good candidates. It is a good idea to interview each promising candidate (even if there is only one) to ensure they understand the role and hear how they want to contribute.

### Orient and Support Patient Representatives

- Orient a new patient representative to be able to fulfill their duties. Orientation could be done with other new committee members or separately focusing on their patient representative role.
- Orientation should include:
  - o introductions and sharing personal stories,
  - o the vision, strategic plan, priorities and any other relevant information about FHT/NPLC,
  - o the terms of reference of the committee along with the meeting schedule and any other logistics,
  - o the roles and responsibilities of committee members, and
  - o privacy, confidentiality and conflict of interest requirements of all committee members and the process to report any issues that may arise.
- Consider supporting further training for the patient representative over time if of interest and resources permit.
- Ensure that the patient representative feels that their contributions are heard and valued and that others on the committee recognize and consider their input. The Committee Chair plays a key role in this regard.

### Further support

For further support related to this topic or other governance and leadership education, please contact:

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