

THAMES VALLEY FHT – FHO-FHT RELATIONSHIP FRAMEWORK

Quick Facts:

- Established 2007
- London/Middlesex, Oxford & Elgin Counties
- 18 sites
- 15 FHOs; 115 MDs
- 86.2 IHPs, 25.3 Admin
- Mixed, skills-based Board
- >155,000 rostered patients

Supporting Documents:

[Relationship Framework for the Thames Valley Family Health Team Corporation and TVFHT Affiliated Physicians](#)

Appendix 5: Lead Physician Responsibilities

Homepage:

<https://thamesvalleyfht.ca/>

Summary

The Thames Valley Family Health Team (TVFHT) is a very large FHT that spans both urban and rural catchment regions. As the FHT grew, they found that there was a significant range of expectations and motivation among FHOs and individual physicians for joining the FHT. The Relationship Framework was created to document a common understanding of roles and requirements of physicians and their staff, the FHT and its staff and executive, and the Board of Directors. Because the Relationship Framework is not signed, it does not have legal weight; rather is used as a reference document to set expectations, reinforce consistency and address challenges as they arise.

Background

The TVFHT covers the urban area of London in addition to the rural regions of Middlesex, Oxford and Elgin Counties in Southern Ontario. TVFHT has 115 physicians between 15 FHOs that provide primary care across 18 academic and community sites. The sites are distributed across the regions to serve more than 155,000 patients. To help manage the large organization, TVFHT has created the role of the Medical Director (one day per week) in addition to the individual Lead Physicians for each FHO (approximately 2 – 3 hours per month, but varies from site to site and month to month depending on activity). The Medical Director reports directly to the FHT Board. The FHT is governed by an 11 member mixed, skills-based Board, composed of physicians appointed by their FHOs (organized geographically) as well as individuals elected from outside the FHT who bring specific experiences and skills to the benefit of the organization.

Motivation for Change

The TVFHT felt there was not a common understanding of what the mutual expectations were within the FHT, even between members who had been with the FHT from the beginning. This was further strained as communication within the FHT became more challenging as the number of FHOs and physicians grew, and multiple, distant sites proliferated. It became apparent that a common framework was required to manage expectations and set standards for both new and existing FHOs and physicians members. The Relationship Framework was created as a touchstone to support a common understanding of the physician-FHT dynamic within the TVFHT. TVFHT views the Relationship Framework as a valuable tool to reinforce expectations by physicians and the FHT, as well as to mediate potential conflicts in a consistent and structured manner.

The Process

Grounding Document

The Relationship Framework was developed collectively by the Executive Director, Medical Director and the Board in 2014. Many elements of the Framework already existed and so were gathered into one document. For instance, the Framework reiterates policy statements on professional behaviour and medical professionalism from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO). Other sections, such as corporate accountabilities and conflict resolution, were developed specifically for the Framework. Lead Physicians at each site had the opportunity to review the final draft document before it

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was accepted by the Board. After vigorous debate, the Board agreed that physician signatures would not be required as the Relationship Framework was about relationships, dialogue and allowing conversations to happen, not about legalities.

“We have to be careful to avoid ‘generating more heat, than light’. Because [the Relationship Framework] isn’t binding it doesn’t necessarily need regular review and care should be taken to not generate cumulative documents and associated reviews that will agitate physicians.”

– Norm Furtado, Former Medical Director

Success Factors

Lead Physician Ownership

With 115 physicians, it is not feasible for TVFHT to hold a meeting with all member physicians present and have all physicians current and in agreement with ongoing developments. The Lead Physicians are the TVFHT’s best solution for achieving physician representation. When the Relationship Framework was implemented, Lead Physicians were responsible for sharing and discussing the Framework to ensure that all physicians within their FHO were engaged and understood it. This responsibility was derived from a clause to “share information” within a role agreement that the Lead Physicians sign. As new physicians join TVFHT, the Relationship Framework is reviewed in their FHT orientation.

The Challenges

Multiple Physician FHT Expectations

Individual physician behaviours can range from those who are active, collaborative participants to those who are largely part of the FHT as an extension of their FHO and are not interested in the FHT programs and services. The Relationship Framework helps to create common ground between the 115 physicians in the FHT. It is important that when a FHO joins a FHT that a substantial majority of physicians in the FHO have a shared interest in joining the FHT, not just a few physicians who are bringing the rest along.

“The current government appetite is that of FHT services being made available to all Ontarians, though there is still much uncertainty about how this will be achieved. FHTs may be asked to take on more practices and physicians and their patients. Be careful when you expand. Do the due diligence to make sure that everyone is on the same page, and has the right perspective that aligns with your FHT. Do greater education upfront to avoid issues later.”

– Norm Furtado, Former Medical Director

The Benefits

TVFHT believes the critical factor is understanding the absolute importance of relationships, and turning individual relationships into organizational trust and collaboration. With the Relationship Framework, TVFHT leverages the following benefits:

- / Unifying document for the organization
- / Defines expectations and requirements for members
- / Greater uniform agreement of FHT practices and policies
- / Promotes collaboration and sharing of resources for better service delivery
- / Consistent and structured conflict management approach