

Overview of eReferral Project for Kidney Care Services in Alberta

The Alberta electronic referral tool, eReferral Advice Request, available on the provincial Alberta Netcare Portal, is an initiative launched by Alberta Health Services (AHS) to provide a reliable platform for interaction between primary care providers (PCPs) and specialists for access to specialist care. The Interdisciplinary Chronic Disease Collaboration (ICDC), Kidney Strategic Clinical Network, Alberta Kidney Care, University of Alberta, University of Calgary, and AHS Access Improvement have collaborated together for the implementation of this project to enhance access to optimal care for patients living with chronic kidney disease (CKD).

Current status – Pilot Launch

There has been significant growth in the number of primary care providers using eReferral to refer patients to specialists for advice or consultation. As of July 31, 2018, there are approximately 1,300 primary care providers who have referred patients using eReferral in the province. Over the last six months, there have been 344 new providers added to ~900 existing providers since implementation (Figure 1). Similarly, there was also an exponential growth in the volume of referrals (both for advice and consultation) over the period. There are over 6,200 requests across 17 specialties (Figure 1). Nephrology (Kidney Care) as a specialty has processed over 200 Advice Requests during the period under review. In 73 per cent of cases sent to nephrology as Advice Requests, a face-to-face clinic visit was avoided; and primary care providers were supported to continue managing patients in their own communities without the need to travel (Figure 2). The time for a specialist response from the receipt of referral was about five-to-six days across all AHS zones, in contrast to two-to-three months wait times for the traditional referral systems.

Dissemination Strategy and Next Steps

The ICDC is working in collaboration with the Kidney Health SCN on a project to facilitate the uptake eReferral for ambulatory kidney care across the province, and study its impact on enhancing access to and improving quality of care for CKD patients particularly those living in the underserved communities of Alberta. Selected rural and remote communities in northern and southern Alberta and inner-city areas of Edmonton and Calgary are included in this study. In the study, the impact of eReferral on improving quality of kidney care (evidence-based recommended care) will be examined. We will also conduct a process and cost evaluation to determine system, provider and patient level factors that could impact a widespread implementation. This will enable us to determine barriers and enablers for a wider adoption of eReferral.

On-site educational visits are being conducted at participating Primary Care Networks (PCNs) across the province. The study is expected to be complete by 2021. The results of the study are expected to inform implementation of eReferral as an alternate model of ambulatory kidney care delivery in Canada and beyond.

Did you know?

- Approximately 1,300 primary care providers are using eReferral Advice Requests to gain timely specialist advice.
- Advice Requests are responded to within five-to-six days.
- A face-to-face specialist visit was avoided in 73% of nephrology cases.
- The ICDC and KH SCN are actively conducting on-site educational visits, to encourage uptake, throughout the province.
- eReferral data will be collected until 2021; a number of important clinical outcomes will be comprehensively evaluated.

Figure 1: Overall eReferral Utilization in Alberta



Figure 2: Weekly Snapshot: Nephrology eReferral Advice Utilization

Nephrology eReferral Requests by Referring Provider and Week (between 01-Aug-2017 and 03-Aug-2018)

