



## Linking Physicians to Improve Care

Specialist LINK connects Calgary area physicians with specialists for non-urgent advice

by Bart Goemans, CMP



### Specialist *LINK*

Specialist LINK connects family doctors and specialists through a real-time telephone advice line that improves collaboration, efficiency and enhances the coordination of patient care delivery.

The line was developed through the Health Systems Support (HSS) Calgary zone working group comprised of representatives from Alberta Health Services and Primary Care Networks combined with specialists. HSS first piloted the phone line with GI in late 2014. Both GI specialists and family doctors immediately started seeing the benefits of collaboration to confirm treatment plans.

Currently, the partnerships have grown to include gastroenterology, respiratory and neurology specialists and HSS is in discussion with several other groups. Endocrinology will join in October. To date, over 700 advice calls have been made to specialists by family doctors.

“Specialist LINK is part of an initiative to strengthen and improve relationships between primary care and specialty care in order to better coordinate and improve care for our patients,” says Dr. Linda Slocombe, committee chair for HSS. Here is what some family doctors have said:

*“I found this service very helpful. GI specialist was extremely pleasant and helpful and helped me to come up with an appropriate management plan for the patient.”*

*“Great service. We definitely need more of this service with different specialties.”*

*“Link is a great source! Will hopefully save the number of unneeded referrals to the specialist.”*

“Specialists and family docs love it and feel like we are making a positive impact on waiting times when also combined with the use of referral pathways,” Dr. Slocombe adds. “In a recent survey of participating specialists, 66 per cent indicated the phone advice line prevented an ER visit and 12 per cent estimated it avoided an unnecessary diagnostic test.”

As the original specialist group, GI is seeing an early trend of positive results in reducing wait times and focusing resources on patients that are in the highest need of specialty services. With over 1,800 referrals coming into central access and triage per month, over 60 of those are now being triaged back to a patient’s medical home for care.

Timeliness is a key in the success of the Specialist LINK service. Calls are responded to within 30 minutes, which allows for the doctor to get immediate advice regarding a patient’s care.



**Calgary area physicians may use Specialist LINK for non-urgent advice.**

**For all emergencies, refer directly to the Emergency Department or contact the RAAPID Line:**

**North: 1-800-282-9111 or 780-735-0811  
South: 1-800-661-1700 or 403-944-4486**