

PA Project Update

Great progress: PAs making meaningful contributions to health care team

Thanks to you, more than 60 physician assistants are now at work in hospitals, community health centres, and diabetes and long-term care management settings across Ontario.

The evaluation of our emergency department demonstration project showed that PAs, working as part of a team, are having a positive impact on Ontario's health care system by contributing to shorter wait times, shorter hospital stays, and fewer patients leaving the emergency department without being seen. Early feedback from the second wave of demonstration projects suggests that PAs are also making meaningful contributions to the health care team in a variety of medical settings.

Meanwhile, there is well warranted excitement about the new two-year Bachelor of Health Sciences (Physician Assistant) program at McMaster University. Twenty-one students began the program on September 2, 2008.

The 21 students in the inaugural class were selected from among 259 applicants and are incredibly

diverse: they come from 16 different educational backgrounds, range in age from 20 to 49 years, and include current students and a variety of working professionals such as an engineer, a health journalist and a social worker, among others.

Behind the scenes, the Physician Assistant Implementation Steering Committee—made up of employers, educators, regulators and health professionals – has been guiding the development, implementation, and evaluation of the initiative since January 2007.

“We're really thrilled with the success we've had so far,” said Jeff Goodyear, Director, Health Human Resources Policy Branch, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, who sits on the steering committee. “The rollout has been very smooth, thanks to the outstanding efforts of the stakeholders leading the project, the skill of the PAs involved, and the health care providers who have welcomed their new colleagues to the team.”

Phase I: Emergency Department Pilot Project Evaluation Results

Evaluation results of the initial six ED demonstration project are in! Surveys of ED team members indicated that the addition of PAs and nurse practitioners to interprofessional teams contributed to better patient flow, more integrated and coordinated service delivery, and greater satisfaction with team partnerships and communications.

“The impact of this initial pilot is impressive,” says Dr. Deborah Hellyer, co-chair of the Physician Assistant Implementation Steering Committee. “A review of ED health records showed that the new team makeup contributed to a reduction in the number of patients who left the ED without being seen, lowered the length of stay in the ED, and resulted in patients being seen more quickly.”

Based on such positive evaluation findings, the participating hospitals were funded to extend PA and nurse practitioner positions.

T H E P A P R O J E C T T E A M



Canadian PA Certification Exam and Reception

Congratulations to the many PAs in the project who took part in the July 2008 Canadian PA certification exam. Exam attendance rates were high and we look forward to seeing many more PAs join the eight project participants who already have their Canadian PA certification. The PAs received their exam results from the Physician Assistants' Certification Council in October.

Thank you to all of the PAs who joined representatives from the HealthForceOntario Marketing and Recruitment Agency and Ministry at the PA reception following the exam. Seventy-six PAs attended the reception to share their thoughts about the exam and network with their fellow PAs. Attendees included both PAs from within as well as external to the project.

Physician Assistant Day

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is holding a professional development and peer networking day on Monday, December 1 for all PAs employed in the demonstration project. We are calling it PA Professional Development Day. The agenda for the day is coming together well. Thank you to everyone who provided suggestions for workshop sessions.

In the News

"It's very exciting for RVH to be chosen and looking at a whole new way of providing better health care," said Karen Winter, co-ordinator of the orthopedic care team at RVH. "Our biggest benefit from these PAs will be improving continuity of care of patients," she said. "Having caregivers who follow patients day to day is very important to us."

The Barrie Examiner, March 8, 2008

The province is on the right track with its pilot project aimed at integrating physician assistants into our health-care system. The end game is to deliver better health care to Ontario residents... And it means developing a system that rationally uses the skills of these professionals in ways that provide the best service at the best price. That will be good for all of us.

The Hamilton Spectator, Opinion, August 20, 2008

Just 40 years old and eligible for retirement, Best didn't think twice when the Ontario government came calling with an opportunity to trade in his uniform for a civilian gig... A warrant officer in the military... (h)e was a little apprehensive when he first started his job at Timmins District Hospital. "It was terrifying to say the least. It was the first time I was out of the military in 21 years and it was a different culture, but I love it. It's a really good group here and I've had 100 per cent support from the start."

Northern Ontario Medical Journal, June 2008.

By the numbers

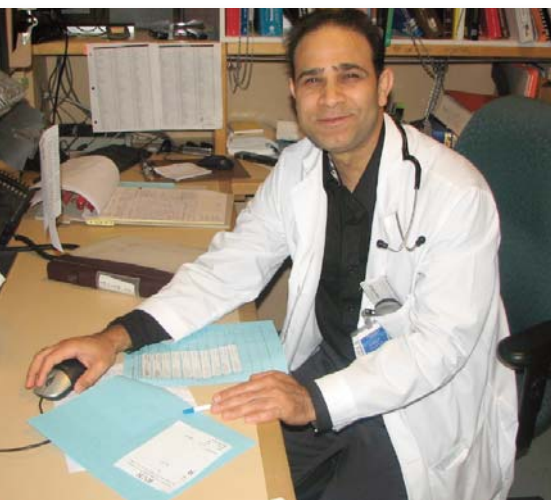
(as of October 30, 2008)

- 61 Number of PAs currently working in demonstration projects across Ontario
- 51 Number of PAs working at 22 hospitals
- 5 Number of PAs working in community health centres
- 5 Number of PAs employed directly by a physician or group of physicians
- 36 Number of international medical graduates in the initiative
- 10 Number of PAs educated in the U.S.
- 3 From above, the number of U.S. educated PAs that are Canadian
- 15 Number of PAs with training from the Canadian Forces

Physician Assistants Speak

In this issue, we hear from physician assistants practising in hospitals.

I am able to provide patient and family education and support which contributes to enhanced



patient satisfaction... I believe the PA role in Ontario will grow and PAs will certainly become an integral part of the health system in Ontario.

Waheed-ur Rehman, PA, General Internal Medicine, Royal Victoria Hospital



I am the eyes and ears for physicians and the link with nurses and other health care professionals... So many doors have opened for me and I've been given the opportunity to showcase the role of physician assistants and how we can make a difference in quality patient care. As I make my rounds of the hospital, I discover that physicians who are not yet part of this exciting health care initiative are eager to find out how they can benefit from my services on a unit at Cambridge Memorial Hospital. I welcome the opportunity!

Jim Tolmie, PA, Complex Continuing Care/Rehabilitation, Cambridge Memorial Hospital

The physician assistant pilot project has been a great experience for me. I am not only learning a lot but I am also getting an opportunity to share my knowledge and skills with other health care professionals. My supervising physician and other staff have commented many times that I am a tremendous help to them. Since I started working as a



physician assistant, not only have patient wait times been reduced but I am allowing physicians to accomplish more in their day.

Jehan Zaib, PA, Surgical Urology, Sault Area Hospital

Where PAs are practising



The physician assistant role was announced in May 2006 with the launch of HealthForceOntario, the government's health human resources strategy. The goal of HealthForceOntario is to give the people of Ontario access to the right number and mix of qualified healthcare providers, now and in the future.

The PA initiative is being led by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ontario Medical Association. They are joined by the Ontario Hospital Association and the Association of Ontario Health Centres in introducing physician assistants to healthcare teams at sites across the province.

Contact information

For more information about the PA initiative, search "physician assistant" at www.healthforceontario.ca