

New primary care Web site saves physicians time and frustration

Dr. Patricia Mirwaldt

PC Central, a first-of-its-kind Web site designed by family physicians for family physicians, provides “one-stop shopping” for fast access to a wide range of clinical information and local health resources. It was launched in Vancouver as a small pilot project last November and is already making a big difference to those who are using it.

In a recent survey of PC Central pilot project participants, physicians estimated that the Web site saves them more than 30 minutes a week. And they expect the time savings to increase as they get more familiar with the site and use it more frequently in their daily practice.

The PC Central project was initiated in September 2005 when Vancouver Coastal Health established a working group of 12 local family physicians to lead the development of a Web-based hub for primary health care services. The working group decided that for the purposes of the pilot project and evaluation, the initial content of the site would be limited to key areas identified by physicians and their medical office assistants.

Version 1 of the PC Central pilot project provides more than 750 content items and information links chosen by the family physicians and their practice teams as being most helpful to their daily work.

These include:

- **Clinical decision support tools** to help physicians quickly find the evidence-based information they need to diagnose, prescribe and follow up to achieve the best possible patient outcomes
- **Local health resources** and contact information to link patients to other community services and supports as appropriate
- **Referral** processes, criteria and forms to refer patients to the appropriate specialist, diagnostic or treatment services as quickly as possible
- **Patient handouts** to provide patients with materials, Web site URLs and information that they can refer to after their office visit



- **Practice enhancement information** to support the implementation of new technology, business practices and processes
- **Links** to medical and allied health professional associations and other relevant information.

An initial evaluation of the project indicates that the features most valued by physicians are the clinical decision support tools and clinical guidelines that reduce or eliminate the need to refer patients to other health resources. Online access to forms and requisitions for other health facilities and diagnostic services was also identified as a valuable time saver.

All physicians surveyed said they would recommend PC Central to their colleagues and will continue to use the site after the pilot period has ended. The site is enhanced daily with feedback from users who add locally relevant content, as well as favourite clinical tools or references. With technical support provided by Vancouver Coastal Health, the site is built by its users to be most relevant to local physicians.

User feedback provided via the formal evaluation process will guide the future development of PC Central, with a goal to enhance the content and make the site accessible to all primary care physicians once the pilot phase is concluded.

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