

Improving access to specialist care: The successful implementation and integration of eConsultation into a Family Health Team

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Background

- There is an urgent need to transform the delivery of specialist care for Canadians, as current wait times have increased by 50% across all provinces in the last 10 years.¹
- eConsultation is a promising approach to improve timely access to specialist advice.

About the eConsult Service

- The Champlain BASE* eConsult service is a secure, web-based tool that allows primary care providers (PCPs) quick access to specialist care for their patients.
- Over 40% of cases processed through the system led to an unnecessary referral to a specialist being avoided.

Objectives

To examine how the Bruyère Family Health Team (FHT) integrated the eConsult service into its practice environment.

Methods

- The Bruyère FHT is located within the Élisabeth Bruyère Hospital in Ottawa, Ontario. It is comprised of 29 PCPs providing care to 15,000 patients.
- The eConsult service was launched in June 2013.
- This is a descriptive study of all eConsult cases submitted by the Bruyère FHT during June 2013 – August 2014
- For each eConsult case submitted at all sites, the system automatically collected data regarding:
 - the PCP
 - the consulting specialist
 - the clinical questions posed
 - the answers provided
 - The time for reply
 - Responses to a mandatory close-out survey completed by PCPs

Results

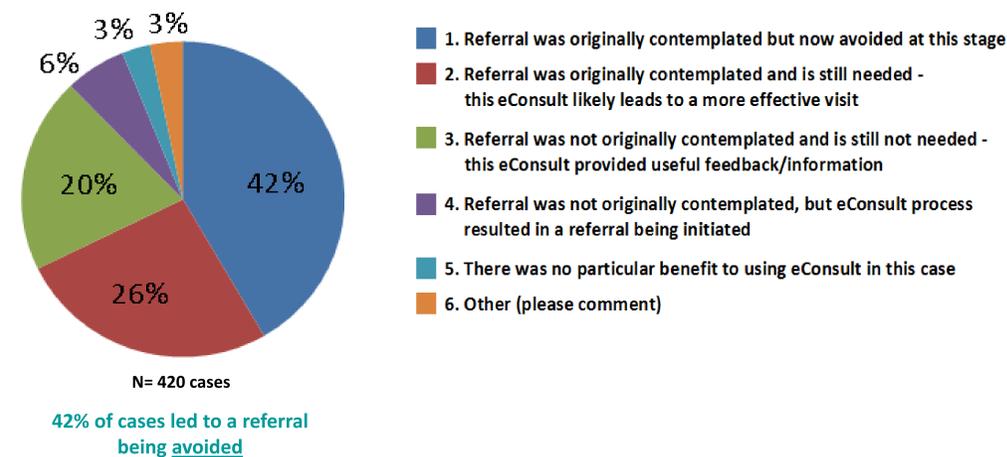
Implementation and Workflow



- Integration of the eConsult service into existing workflow processes enabled **rapid uptake**.
- Active engagement of not only the physicians but the **clerical team** enabled the FHT to implement the eConsult service in a manner adapted to local needs.

Service Utilization Data (From March 2013 - August 31, 2014)

Impact of e-Consultation on Referral
[from PCP survey responses completed for each case]



Results

Utilization Data

- Between June 2013 and August 2014, the Bruyère FHT:
- Processed **420 cases** using the eConsult service, with Dermatology, Neurology, Radiology, and General Pediatrics being the top specialties.
 - Accounted for **15%** of the consultations requested during the period.

Current Research Limitations

- The eConsult service has been implemented for only one year
 - Bruyère FHT is still **refining the process by which it can collect and analyse conventional consultation data**.
- Need to improve the degree of **data resolution** captured in the Electronic Medical Record
 - Might be underestimating the total referral made.

Impact Statement

- The Bruyère FHT has implemented an electronic consultation service in a manner which is **dramatically improving the quality and speed of patient care delivery within the organization**.
- It takes 5-7 business days to process a regular referral, whereas eConsult cases are processed on the day they are received and answered by specialists within 48 hours.
- Real time data allows for more sophisticated questions and hence better and quicker electronic consultations.
- The eConsult service may be allowing providers to practice in a more reflective manner.

Contact Information
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¹ Barua B, Esmail N. Waiting Your Turn: Wait Times for Health Care in Canada. Vancouver: Fraser Institute; 2013 Oct.