

eReferral Advice Request: Providing specialist advice to physicians, including those with patients with digestive health conditions

Highlights:

- eReferral Advice Request is a service available through eReferral in Alberta Netcare to provide timely access to specialist advice for physicians, including those caring for patients with digestive health conditions.
- A specialist responds within five days (often sooner), and provides clinical advice and guidance to support the family physician in caring for the patient.

Family physicians who need specialist advice for patients with gastroenterology or hepatology issues are welcoming an e-referral service that introduced those specialties in December 2017.

Called eReferral Advice Request, the service allows family physicians to submit questions, relevant background and clinical findings on cases they need help with.

A specialist responds within five days with advice and, if a referral is warranted, the specialist advises on what investigations should be included with the referral.

“I used Advice Request to ask a gastroenterologist for advice about interim management options for a patient who was in a great deal of pain and distress, and who was awaiting a GI consultation,” says Dr. Julia Carter, a Calgary-based family physician who had a very positive first experience with Advice Request.

“Once I got set up, it was easy to input my questions and attach relevant investigations from Netcare, and my referral clerk was able to attach images from my electronic medical record easily too. I got a response two days later that was clear and helpful, and my patient was very appreciative of the timely advice.”

Specialists who respond to Advice Request consultations also see the value in the new service.

“Advice Request provides a secure portal to communicate with a GI specialist about patient issues that may not require a specialist visit. This saves patients from waiting for an unnecessary consultation and will ultimately will reduce wait lists and wait times for gastroenterologists,” says Dr. Dan Sadowski, a gastroenterologist at the University of Alberta Hospital.

Until now, many patients were referred to specialists out of an abundance of caution or simply because the family physician did not have a clear idea on the next step in care. Many of these referrals were very appropriate, but others could have been avoided if family physicians had additional support or resources.

Evaluation of a similar service in Ottawa has shown that in 40 per cent of cases where a referral was originally considered, that referral was no longer required after receiving the specialist's advice.

Advice Request is also available for numerous other specialty areas, including: Addiction Mental Health – Opiate Agonist Therapy, endocrinology, general internal medicine, nephrology, obstetrics and gynecology, pulmonary, spinal neurosurgery, and urology.

Additional specialty areas will be added throughout 2018 and 2019, further building the value of Advice Request for family physicians, specialists, and especially for patients needing timely, quality care.

To learn more about eReferral Advice Request, visit <http://www.albertanetcare.ca/eReferral.htm>

Learning resources to support clinicians are available at <http://www.albertanetcare.ca/learningcentre/eReferral.htm>