

THE RESULTS ARE IN...



Primary Care Survey Results

Access Improvement Team – January 31, 2018

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

The AHS Access Improvement Team aimed to understand the current issues regarding the referral of patients from primary care to specialty clinics. A short survey was developed to collect information from primary care that would help identify those issues and inform the development of electronic solutions, leading to better referral experience and patient safety.

METHOD

The survey was designed for primary care providers (physicians, nurses, referral coordinators, medical office assistants, and clinic managers). The survey was carried out from September 25th to December 29th, 2017. Participants were invited to complete the online survey through Primary Care Network (PCN) newsletters, AHS Primary Health Care Program newsletters and email distribution list. Surveys were also handed out at the Accelerating Primary Care Conference and Family Medicine Showcase. Paper copies were destroyed after recording the responses electronically. All responses were anonymous.

KEY FINDINGS

There were 142 primary care responders during the 3 months with all 5 zones represented. The response rate was 3% given that there are more than 4,800 family physicians in Alberta. Calgary and Edmonton Zones had the most number of responders and South Zone had the least number of responders. There was response from 28 Primary Care Networks (PCNs), with Calgary Foothills and Edmonton North PCNs having the highest number of responders.

The survey demonstrated that the patient referral process was multidisciplinary. A number of clinics indicated that they had a referral coordinating system, and others reported that a nurse, receptionist or medical office assistant may sometimes be involved in the process. Primary Care reported that they encountered challenges when referring patients to certain specialty clinics, particularly, Orthopedics, Psychiatry and Urology, but also to other specialty groups such as Colon and Rectal surgery and Gastroenterology.

Several challenges highlighted during the referral process include, no response or delayed response from clinics regarding referrals, inconsistency of referral requirements and inconsistency of the actual process, for example, where to send referrals. Other challenges encountered include technical difficulties sending referrals such as faxes not going through and referrals declined without alternative management plans for the patients. Common problems reported by patients include long waiting times and late notification/insufficient details regarding the specialist appointment.

LOOKING AHEAD

The survey highlights a few challenges within the system and a number of barriers for patients to access specialty services. We know that Alberta's medical community is working hard to improve patient access to care, and the voice from primary care is important to build a stronger medical home for patients. We aim to start the conversations, make the connections and share the resources that can improve Alberta's referral experience. Communication needs to be timely and consistent, please let us know how you would like to stay connected!