

Putting the Heart in Home to Hospital to Home Transitions



Caption: Primary Health Care Integration Network patient and family advisors (from left to right) Melissa Hartwell, Lucille Partington and Debbie Lynam (Missing: Lisa Wilson and Phil Norris)

Patient and family advisors share priorities for home and acute transitions

Dear Alberta Health System: “Not every patient has family to help care for them so referral to community supports and equipment should be a basic requirement of any discharge plan.”

This concern was raised by Debbie Lynam, Patient Advisor, at a meeting in September. And members of Alberta’s health system were asked to respond, right then and there, about what needs to happen to address this issue.

“What matters most to me about improving transitions in care for patients and families is communication and detailed planning of discharge requirements . . . Patients should have the opportunity to be part of the care plan and discuss any additional requirements they might have.”

Debbie Lynam, Patient Advisor
Edmonton zone, Primary Health
Care Integration Network
Coalition member



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Improving patient transitions from home to hospital to home is one area of focus for the Primary Health Care Integration Network. To

“We could not phone our local doctor... he is on holidays... Homecare said they could not come because the roads were too bad. We did call back to the hospital but we didn't really know who to speak to and no one was able to help us.”

Lucille Partington, Patient Advisor North zone, Primary Health Care Integration Network Coalition member

better understand what patients actually experience during their transitions, the Network used a creative engagement strategy at the September meeting of its Coalition, which includes members from across Alberta's primary care system such as family physicians and representatives from government and academia.

Patient advisors set the tone for the meeting by each reading a letter written to the Alberta health system. Advisors from three zones (North, Edmonton and Calgary) each shared their story and what matters most about improving transitions in care.

Coalition members, including the patient advisors, were asked to identify potential solutions along with work currently underway in their zone to address the challenges and gaps raised by the stories.

“My patient experience has, for the most part, been very positive . . . For both of my stays in hospital, I am in complete wonder as to WHY the Alberta health-care system is still living in the Stone Age from a technology information sharing prospective.”

Melissa Hartwell, Patient Advisor Calgary zone, Primary Health Care Integration Network Coalition member

The output from the Coalition meeting is helping inform the home to hospital to home transitions work going forward. “Having the patient advisors share their stories helped to anchor our work to their experience,” says Mona Delisle, an Acting Director within Alberta Health Service's Primary Health Care program and a leader working on hospital to home transitions. “This allows us to keep top of mind who and why we are doing this work. We sometimes get caught up in operational system issues, but when we continuously remind ourselves of these stories it makes working through our challenges more meaningful and motivating.”

Keeping advisor engagement fresh and meaningful

“At each Coalition meeting, we strive to bring the patient advisor voices to the forefront in new and creative ways,” says Joanne Ganton, staff liaison with the Primary Health Care Integration Network. “Active participation of the advisors is our goal so they are meaningfully engaged at every Coalition meeting.”

Feedback from Coalition members demonstrates that the patient advisor stories and participation are a highlight of the meeting. Results from our first patient engagement survey indicate that 92 per cent of

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Coalition members/leaders who responded feel that advisors provide an important perspective in meetings, and 100 per cent of respondents surveyed agree or strongly agree that patient advisors make a positive impact on the work of the Network. Survey results also showed that 80 per cent of patient advisor respondents feel their contributions make a positive impact.

Interested in helping improve primary health care in Alberta? Become part of our virtual patient and family advisor network. Contact Joanne Ganton at joanne.ganton@ahs.ca.