



## Pharmacy line solves patients' night-time worries

In the past, Alberta patients who thought they were having an adverse drug reaction, accidental overdose or other drug-related issue in the middle of the night had one option—get to the hospital. Now they have another one, and it's much faster and more straightforward.

**Pharmacist Network Alberta (PNA)'s** Capital Health Link—Pharmacist Line (CHL-PL) gives callers quick access to medication information and advice from 5 p.m. to 9 a.m., from pharmacists on overnight/on-call duty at Shoppers Drug Mart, Safeway, Save-on-Foods, London Drugs and MediDrugs pharmacies.

The CHL-PL, which was led by Clinical Services Manager Carla Grant and went live in October last year, uses technology to link pharmacists with the nurses who are fielding the calls, while a health information system (HIS) supports the documentation of the patient record by both nurse and pharmacist.

The HIS handles a number of important tasks:

- real-time sharing of call details in the software system, called Sharp Focus (SF), between nurses and pharmacists;
- a database linked to SF for integrated quality assurance;

- a way of accommodating nursing and pharmacist clinical care paths within SF, using a blend of protocol-based and judgement-based care;
- an automated system for reviewing adverse drug reactions (ADRs) and submitting the ADR reports to Canada Vigilance; and
- a database for joint quality management between the nursing and pharmacist clinical teams.

Participating pharmacists access patient data and the HIS through a virtual private network (VPN) connection to the CHL server, which is located behind the Capital Health firewall. Other security features include individual pharmacist registration, unique user names, complex passwords, fingerprint ID and security tokens.

A caller looking for drug information between 5 p.m. and 9 a.m is transferred to the CHL-PL telephony system, while his or her SF file is flagged for pharmacist retrieval and use. Pharmacists can review the nursing triage notes and complete their clinical documentation in the same record.

Each month, the HIS is used to audit nurse and pharmacist calls for data and

clinical quality. Audits, ongoing training, issues management and policies and procedures make up a quality assurance program used to maintain high-quality patient care. The HIS also generates regular service metrics for CHL, and these reports are provided to all participating pharmacies for proactive performance management.

As of August 2008, the CHL-PL had handled more than 2,600 calls, 80% of which were answered live by pharmacists in less than 30 seconds. Around 20% of these calls involved suspected ADRs. In 175 cases, ADR reports were submitted to the Canada Vigilance program for monitoring medication safety.

The judges all see different benefits of the CHL-PL. One calls it “an excellent use of technology to improve health service delivery,” while another says it represents a perfect opportunity for “interprofessional collaboration.” Finally, one judge points out how the service manages to both recognize pharmacists' clinical expertise while using technology to make use of some underutilized resources.

—Adam Pletsch



Clockwise: Wilson Kwan, Carla Grant, Cindy Connell, Lois Andruski, Linda Knox, Nanett Hironymous

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