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Technology Opens Doors to Personalized Health Information

Clients with diabetes get online access to their care

It wasn't that long ago when people would travel to their closest bank and wait in line for the teller to pay their bills. How times have changed. By now, most Canadians have experienced some form of 'virtual' transaction via the Internet. Whether it's for accessing bank information, booking airline tickets or purchasing a gift from any one of a number of online stores, technology has changed people's expectations for getting things done.

This expectation for access is spilling into health care. The SIMS partners have recognized the increasing demand from their patients and clients to have similar access to information regarding their care. The nine health care organizations are responding to the request through the creation of 'patient portals.'

A patient portal is a secure website that allows patients access to parts of their health record supported by education and supportive resources. Structured similar to an online banking website, patient portals are designed to be secure and easy to use, strengthening the relationship between patients and their health care team.

SIMS is using a common patient portal application initially developed for Breast Cancer Survivorship patients at UHN's Princess Margaret Hospital. The portal is being expanded to include other programs across the SIMS Partners, including diabetes management and chronic kidney disease.

"Because of the high volume of health information available from multiple sources, the portal provides a single point of entry for patients accessing the information they need to better manage their own health concerns relating to their condition," said Dr. Philip Ellison, Medical Advisor, Toronto Central CCAC.

Studies show patient portals help patients feel more in control of their illness, more hopeful and more comfortable communicating with their health care team. Patient portals also offer people a better understanding of their illness, resulting in greater participation in their care.

"Have you ever tried searching for a specific condition on the Internet? Thousands of websites come up. How is a person to know which website has credible information?" asked Mark Casselman, a Project Manager overseeing the development of the patient portal through SIMS. "Our patient portal helps clients find credible material and resources that have been selected by a group of health care practitioners. As the portal grows, interactive tools will be added to make the experience more personalized."

With intuitive web page links such as "My Health," "My Support" and "My Calendar," patients will be able to set goals and assess their progress. Features will include secure

access to the patient’s own personal health profile, medication lists and refill reminders, appointment calendar and a personal journal.

“Moving forward, we will expand the portal to include tools that assist clients with identifying and working towards personal health goals in a given area,” added Selina Brudnicki, a SIMS Project Manager involved with the patient portal’s development. “This in turn provides tailored education, empowering clients to be an active part of their care."

Together through SIMS, Bridgepoint Health, Central Community Care Access Centre, St. John’s Rehab Hospital, Providence Healthcare, Toronto Central Community Care Access Centre, Toronto Rehabilitation Institute, University Health Network, West Park Healthcare Centre and Women’s College Hospital are transforming the way health care is delivered.