

Beyond the fax machine: the future of electronic communication in healthcare

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As physicians, we all know the way we communicate needs to be dramatically improved. Why do we still have physicians sending faxes that can't be properly traced and logged? Why does it take multiple phone calls to resolve straight-forward questions? Why are subtleties of patient interactions lost in translation as physicians and their staff struggle to fill out forms by hand?

A recent survey of 150 Canadian physicians conducted by TELUS Health revealed that phone (85%) and fax (65%) are the top two means physicians use to share patient information and critical medical data with other healthcare professionals¹.

This continued reliance on outdated tools makes for unnecessary inefficiencies and stress for clinicians who are already overwhelmed by demand.

Demand for digital healthcare has never been higher, and in a paper- and faxed-based paradigm, the reality

is that physicians are turning to alternate solutions to address their needs and those of their patients.

Not all forms of communication are created equal

Some forms of communication are not secure and are not sanctioned as ideal practices by regulatory authorities, not to mention inefficient in terms of facilitating agile communication among the myriad points of contact in a patient's circle of care. A recent report prepared by Deep Mind showed that more and more doctors are turning to Snapchat to share patient scans². A TELUS Health study noted that nearly 30% family physicians and close to 40% of specialists email their colleagues for clinical purposes¹. But these tools are not connected to the patient's medical record; so, unless the physician cuts and pastes message threads into the chart, those communications are soon forgotten.

Provider-to-provider communications to drive connected, collaborative healthcare.

Launched in July 2017, TELUS Health's MedDialog is a national clinical solution that allows physicians to communicate electronically with other physicians regarding the care of their patients – directly from their EMR. These digital exchanges enable more efficient clinical practice and better patient care by ensuring that all communication history, such as referrals, specialist consultations, laboratory testing results and other patient information, remains within the digital patient chart. This not only saves the physician valuable time which could be spent with patients, but also has the potential to eliminate fatal medical errors.

Communication among a patient's care team will no longer be a sporadic, disjointed and unreliable chain of telephone calls, faxes and letters in the mail. It can help redefine Canada's healthcare system to one of truly integrated care that fully engages patients as partners in the care process.

Since the launch of the pilot in the Ottawa region in July 2017, MedDialog has started to digitally connect physicians using TELUS Health's PS Suite® and Med Access EMRs. The solution will be added to other TELUS Health EMRs across the country through the end of 2018 to create a national messaging solution. The solution will evolve to connect all 20,000 physicians using TELUS EMRs and be integrated with other software vendors to enable communication with physicians using other EMR platforms.

For further information on MedDialog, visit telushealth.com/meddialog.

Snapchat and Instagram are being used more and more often – but are social media apps really appropriate for patient care?

¹ Study conducted by TELUS Health with 159 EMR customers nationally in January 2017.

² <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/jul/05/doctors-using-snapchat-to-send-patient-scans-to-each-other-panel-finds>

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This article is based on a blog published by Michael Guerriere in the Huffington Post blog.