Videoconferencing and Interprofessional Support Can Improve Access to Care in Saskatchewan

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A relatively high proportion of the Saskatchewan population resides in smaller communities and rural areas. Travel to access rheumatology follow-up and care for people with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) in these areas may be challenging. There have been several reports of utilization of telehealth in the provision of rheumatology consultation. Our group undertook a study supported with research funding from the Canadian Initiative for Outcomes in Rheumatology care (CIORA), to evaluate whether RA patients followed longitudinally, using videoconferencing and interprofessional care support, have comparable disease control to those followed in traditional in-person rheumatology clinics.

A total of 85 RA patients were allocated to either traditional in-person rheumatology follow-up or video-confer-
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Physicians continue to implement electronic medical records (EMR) into their practice with the aim of improving the quality of care delivered and work flow efficiency. The integration of EMR solutions into clinical practices has been supported by several provincial agencies. In Ontario, OntarioMD was established to help community physicians select, implement and adopt EMRs. The certified EMR platforms were created to support primary care physicians and were not fully prepared to support specialists’ needs. In the absence of essential tools and functionality for the rheumatology community, the Ontario Rheumatology Association (ORA) established an EMR subcommittee to identify the needs of the rheumatology community and implement rheumatology-specific tools within existing EMR platforms. The tools that were created included clinical documentation Smart forms (with embedded joint counters, disease activity calculators, PROs and labs), HAQ, BASDAI and BASFI questionnaires, and OBRI Registry Data collection forms.

EMRs continue to revolutionize patient care. Canada Health Infoway reports that 79% of Canadian specialists are currently using EMRs. Rheumatology adoption is slightly lower at 70% with the majority of adoption in Ontario.

It was a daunting task when Ontario physicians were encouraged to transition to EMRs. The certified EMR platforms were created to support primary care physicians and were not fully prepared to support specialists’ needs. In the absence of essential tools and functionality for the rheumatology community, the Ontario Rheumatology Association (ORA) established an EMR subcommittee to identify the needs of the rheumatology community and implement rheumatology-specific tools within existing EMR platforms. The tools that were created included clinical documentation Smart forms (with embedded joint counters, disease activity calculators, PROs and labs), HAQ, BASDAI and BASFI questionnaires, and OBRI Registry Data collection forms.

3) Medical Management

Integrating EMRs into Rheumatology Practices

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Reference:

Figure 1: Increasing use of EMRs by Ontario community rheumatologists: 2010 to 2016.