

ECHO Rheumatology: Improving Access to Rheumatologic Care in Underserved Areas Through Capacity Building

By Claire Bombardier, MD, FRCPC; Amanda Steiman, MD, MSc, FRCPC; Rhonda Mostyn, ECHO Project Manager; and Jane Zhao, MSc, ECHO Research Coordinator

Overview

ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) is a collaborative model of medical education and care management, linking health care providers in far-flung communities with interprofessional specialist teams at urban centers. The ECHO model uses videoconference technology to create a virtual learning group during weekly sessions.

ECHO supports the delivery of the right care at the right time for many complex and common clinical conditions. This model started in New Mexico for Hepatitis C, and has expanded globally, riding on evidence of success for providers and patients. There are now sixteen ECHO programs running in Ontario, with three offered at University Health Network (UHN): Rheumatology, Chronic Pain, and Liver.

Who We Are

In January 2017, UHN in Toronto launched ECHO Rheumatology. Drs. Claire Bombardier and Amanda Steiman co-lead the program with the aim of transferring knowledge, while building confidence and skills to treat rheumatological conditions across the province. The interprofessional specialist team includes three rheumatologists (Claire Bombardier, Amanda Steiman, and Wes Fidler), two ACPAC (or Advanced Clinician Practitioner in Arthritis Care) physiotherapists (Mandy McGlynn and Laura Passalent), one registered nurse (Anne Cymet), one nurse practitioner (Elizabeth Lee), and two pharmacists (Carolyn Whiskin and Jadie Lo).

How ECHO works

ECHO Rheumatology videoconference sessions are on Fridays from 12:00 to 1:30 pm Eastern. Each session is CME-accredited and comprised of a brief didactic presentation on topics related to rheumatology management in primary care, followed by patient case discussions.

All patient cases are real, de-identified and presented by the health care provider participants. The patient cases are where the bulk of the learning occurs. They serve as a springboard for roundtable discussion of differential diagnosis, approaches to workup and treatment, and management.



The interprofessional specialist team and community-based healthcare providers meet for their weekly ECHO session.

The practical consequence is both local and wide-reaching. Locally, the provider learns how to take next steps in a patient's workup and management; more broadly, the other participants take away an approach to similar problems in their respective clinics. Thus, unlike traditional telemedicine, which impacts only the participating provider and their patient, ECHO leverages the sessions to foster a one-to-many community.

ECHO Rheumatology eliminates frustration felt by providers and patients alike, who endure lengthy waiting times to see a rheumatologist. Outcomes from ECHO programs have measured provider improvements in confidence, skills and competence related to rheumatologic management. Providers learn how to initiate workup, formulate a differential diagnosis, manage patients on DMARDs, manage patients with non-pharmacological approaches like exercise, and collaborate effectively with rheumatologists. It reflects a true symbiosis.

After attending ECHO Rheumatology, a family doctor in northern Ontario said, "I feel now that a patient can come into my office and I can make a reasonable estimate about the probability that this person has an inflammatory arthritic condition, maybe even an issue of treatment to make a clear diagnosis, certainly make a much more coherent attempt at diagnosing them."

How do I join ECHO?

1. Register at uhn.echoontario.ca/register/.
2. Attend a live, weekly videoconference session.
3. Participate in group discussions, receive fast-track consultations from a group of interprofessional specialists.
4. Receive no-cost CME credits.

New Resources for Managing Arthritis at Work

By the Arthritis Society

Many readers will be familiar with the online learning resources (arthritis.ca/support-education/online-learning) the Arthritis Society makes available to help your patients better understand and self-manage their condition and symptoms in between rheumatologist appointments.

We have recently added some new resources to our online library to help address another key aspect of living with arthritis: Arthritis and Work (arthritis.ca/support-education/arthritis-and-work). Advised by experts from the Institute of Work and Health and supported by the Ontario Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility's EnAbling Change Program, our new resources include:

- **FOR EMPLOYEES:** A video and podcast to help workers understand their rights and how to communicate their needs to their employers.
- **FOR EMPLOYERS:** A PDF guide to Employment Standards, and accompanying video and podcast to help employers better understand their employees' needs and recognize the benefits of accommodating those needs for their shared success.

These resources supplement our existing workplace tools such as our Arthritis and Work learning module, Joint Matters at Work checklists and more to keep your patients

EMPLOYMENT STANDARD

Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), 2005



As an employer, it is important to know that legislation is in place to promote accessible employment practices for all employees. This resource helps you understand your obligations under the AODA Employment Standard. Organizations that invest in accessible practices report better job retention, higher attendance, lower turnover, enhanced job performance and work quality, better safety records, stronger competitive capabilities and greater customer loyalty.

What is the AODA?

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 or AODA, aims to identify, remove, and prevent barriers for people with disabilities in Ontario. The AODA applies to all public sector organizations, non-profits, and businesses with one or more employees (full-time, part-time, seasonal, or contract). The AODA and the Ontario Human Rights Code (the Code) work together to promote equality and accessibility.

What should you do?

In order to comply with the AODA Employment Standard, you must ensure:

1 An accessible recruitment process. In your hiring process, you need to notify potential applicants that accommodations for individuals with disabilities are available on request. You could include this in the job posting, on your website and in offers of employment.

healthy and contributing to the success of their families and communities through productive work.

You can find our full suite of workplace resources at www.arthritis.ca/work. We encourage you to pass the link along to any of your patients who are of working age.

ECHO Rheumatology

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