

Beyond surveys: A framework for truly engaging patients

Panel debates approaches to patient engagement

Health care institutions should view patients as resources and not risks.

This was one of the key takeaway messages from a lively panel discussion on the provincial patient engagement framework held recently as part of Health Quality Ontario's Quality Rounds series.

The discussion was hosted at St. Joseph's Healthcare in London, Ontario – an institution which many acknowledged during the session as personifying the type of approach to patient engagement advocated in the framework.

After consultation with more than 1000 participants, last fall Health Quality Ontario released the [patient engagement framework](#) as a tool to help institutions and organizations plan, implement and evaluate patient engagement activities.

In her introduction, Amy Lang, Director of Patient, Caregiver and Public Engagement at Health Quality Ontario, said a key to the framework is a recognition that engagement is not done just for the sake of engagement but also with the goal of driving high quality care. She said a [companion guide to the framework](#) has just been released to help support the learnings and the application of best practices in patient engagement.

In the panel discussion, Peter MacLeod, a civic engagement expert and principal and founder of MASS LBP, applauded the framework for not focusing on customer service but rather spelling out a richer “personal, professional, social and organizational development rooted in an ethos of learning.”

He said that while there has been a pervasive attitude of treating patients as risks, organizations are coming to appreciate the value of patients and the public as full partners in health care planning and delivery.

Rather than just having patients and the public fill out surveys – which he described as a sterile vision for engagement – he said the public has “a barn raising capacity” which should be harnessed as an “essential resource” in quality care.

As a patient advisor at Patients Canada and several other institutions in Ontario, Subi Bhandari said every organization had different approaches to patient and caregiver engagement. He said the new framework provides tools for organizations to develop a common approach to delivering patient-centred care and help use the skills offered by patients and caregivers.

Dr. Gillian Kernaghan, president and CEO of St. Joseph's, described how the goal of the most recent strategic plan for the hospital was to be guided by patient voices and ensure patients and families were full partners in the design, measurement and improvement of care.

She said there were a large number of initiatives throughout the organization involving many patient councils in 2015, with a number of tactics of engagement unique to each patient population. In order to create a statement of patient, resident and family values, she said, all of these councils were brought together and the statement was written in the first person, “as if the patients were talking to us.”

Following this in 2016, she said, the hospital created a framework for patient care aligned to the strategic plan– known as a “Care Partnership.”

Dr. Kernaghan noted that while many intuitively think of engaging patients at the individual level for care planning, patients may not always be engaged in program and hospital planning. The St. Joseph’s plan incorporates patient involvement in both advocacy and health care initiatives throughout the many programs and services.

Underlying the care partnership is a commitment to “inform, consult, involve, collaborate (with), and empower patients.”

Lang described St. Joseph’s as a “rich example of an institution that has taken the framework to heart.”

In response to a query on the impact of patient engagement, Health Quality Ontario CEO Dr. Joshua Tepper tweeted that patient engagement has influenced and changed “large swaths” of the work by Health Quality Ontario and what it has produced.