

PA Project Update

Networking, information sharing highlight of "PA Day" PAs true pioneers: Minister of Health

For Mumtaz Khan, a PA practising at the North Hamilton Community Health Centre, the chance to network with peers was the highlight of the recent PA Professional Development Day, or "PA Day," held in Toronto.

"I got to meet PAs who were working at the other demonstration sites," said Khan, a PA who worked in the U.S. before joining the project. "It was interesting to hear what they are experiencing."



PA Mumtaz Khan listens closely to information shared at PA Day.

Turnout for the event was impressive. Seventy-five PAs and PA students attended the December 1 gathering at the Centre for the Evaluation of Health

Professionals Educated Abroad. The group included 90 per cent of PAs participating in the Ontario demonstration projects and all of the students in McMaster's PA program.

In the morning, participants heard speakers talk about PA certification and the role of CAPA. The status of the Ontario PA Initiative, the project's most recent evaluation results, and a review of issues surrounding the delegation of controlled acts were also discussed. In the afternoon, PAs tackled team dynamics, delegation, and professional practice issues in facilitated group sessions.

"It was a fantastic and fruitful day," said Darshana Mehta, a PA at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre. Having representatives from the Ontario Hospital Association, the Ontario Medical Association, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, and the Canadian Association of Physician Assistants (CAPA) present was really helpful. "The discussion went both ways. They gave us information and we shared our questions and queries. They welcomed our suggestions to make the program more successful."

Evaluation results show that others shared Mehta's enthusiasm. A total of 84 per cent of participants said they would "definitely" attend a similar event if organized again. And the vast majority felt that PA Day facilitated professional growth and met their learning needs.



Minister David Caplan addresses PAs and students at CEHPEA.

The Honourable David Caplan, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, closed the conference by thanking and acknowledging the PAs and PA students. "You are true pioneers, new role models who are blazing new trails in Ontario health care," Caplan said. "Thanks to your collective efforts, you're helping to implement one of my key priorities for health – increasing access to health care for all."

PA Day was organized with the help of the Physician Assistant Assessment and Education Subcommittee, chaired by Dr. Nadia Mikhael, a member of the Physician Assistant Implementation Steering Committee. The feedback from PA Day is being carefully reviewed by project stakeholders with a view to making improvements to the program.

T H E P A P R O J E C T T E A M



In the News

Physician assistant program hosts assistant deputy minister

by Laura Thompson, *McMaster Faculty of Health Sciences*, December 16, 2008



Jeff Goodyear (left), Joshua Tepper, and Susan Denburg, Associate Vice-President, Academic and Associate Dean, Education, of the Faculty of Health Sciences, speak with faculty and students of McMaster's physician assistant program

The family doctor who spearheaded the introduction of physician assistants (PAs) to the Ontario health-care system returned to his alma mater yesterday to address the first class of McMaster University students to train for this new role.

Dr. Joshua Tepper, a McMaster alumnus and an Assistant Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, met for an informal discussion with faculty and students from McMaster's physician assistant program. The group was also joined by Jeff Goodyear, Director of the Ministry's Health Human Resources Policy Branch.

McMaster University launched Ontario's first civilian physician assistant education program in September with a class of 21 students for a two-year program.

"It takes tremendous courage to go first," Tepper told the students. "All of you, when you decided to do this, said 'I want to be a pioneer.'"

The Ministry has introduced the PA role in Ontario to help reduce wait times and improve overall quality of care. PAs will work under the direct supervision of a doctor in a variety of settings, and as part of interprofessional health-care teams.

The profession has been part of the health-care system in the U.S. since the 1960s. In Canada, PAs are employed by the Canadian Forces and also work in Manitoba.

"It's been fantastic that McMaster has been able to get out of the woods so quickly with this," Goodyear said. "I think it's really a testament to the kind of school that you are."

The Ministry is currently coordinating several PA demonstration projects across Ontario with international medical graduates and formally educated PAs from the U.S. and Canadian Forces. McMaster's PA class, which graduates in 2010, will be the first civilian group in the province to specifically train in the discipline.

"I want to see you working in environments where you're respected and supported to the full degree of the skills you've been trained with," said Tepper. He earned his MD from McMaster in 1998.

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Existing PA demonstration sites offered chance to extend contracts

PA demonstration projects are being extended to give the Ministry more time to analyze project evaluation data. The analysis will help determine where PAs can best help reduce wait times and improve patient care in Ontario's health care system.

Hospitals, community health centres, and physicians who employ PAs are being given the opportunity to extend the PAs' contracts to March 31, 2011. Contract extensions must be offered for a period of at least six months.

Supervising physicians share experiences at OMA meeting

The Ontario Medical Association (OMA) hosted a one-day information-sharing session for supervising physicians participating in the Physician Assistant Initiative.

As a project partner, the OMA wanted to give supervising physicians an opportunity to network and share information and experiences with colleagues. The physicians discussed issues such as the interim evaluation results, the proposed mechanism for tracking PA activity, the ongoing development of medical directives, billing issues, and the sustainability of physician assistants in Ontario's health care system.

Fourteen physicians from the hospital demonstration project, five from the community health centre demonstration project, and four from the physician-employed physician assistant demonstration project attended the Oct. 3 session at the OMA offices in Toronto.

Physicians indicated they were pleased with the opportunity to share information and meet other supervising physicians.

From the Field

In this issue, we hear from PAs working in community health centres

“The team was very welcoming. They were really open to having a new health care provider, and someone who could possibly spend more time with the patients than the physician... I see a lot of people with chronic diseases compounded by the determinants of health, like diabetes, COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), hypertension, and hyperlipidemia.



Angela Cassell

PAs are a real benefit, with the physician and health care provider shortage. It helps the physician to extend care and provide better care. I also bring a fresh perspective, a new set of eyes.”

Angela Cassell, PA, Somerset West CHC, Ottawa

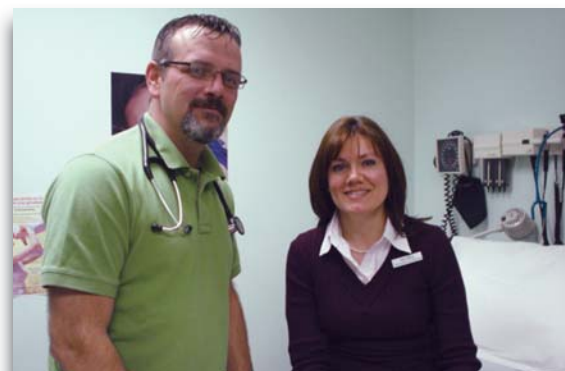
“We’re in a really good groove and I really like working with Angie. She certainly lets me see more people over the course of the day. She’s helpful seeing the more straightforward patients while I see the more complicated patients. Or sometimes I get her to see the more complex patients with chronic illness, who are not entirely well but stable... It certainly has increased accessibility for the patient.

She’s been very well accepted by clients, and part of that is the introduction, that she is not a replacement for me, but that we work together. The team has accepted her too. She’s very friendly, outgoing... It’s been a very positive experience and I would recommend it to other physicians.”

Kristine Whitehead, Supervising MD, Somerset West CHC, Ottawa

“It was quite a change (coming to the CHC from the Armed Forces) since the military population is typically healthier and has less chronic disease. But it’s going great. From what I’ve been hearing from other members of the team, the clients have very positive feedback... I think there’s a lot of potential for PAs in the health care system. We’re a team member and we can help to reduce the stress on physicians by seeing part of their workload. Also, being able to bring health care to Francophones, to people in their own language, is a bonus.”

Stéphane Léveillé PA, Centre de santé communautaire du Temiskaming, Kirkland Lake



PA Stéphane Léveillé and nurse Michelle Murdy take a short break.

“The team looked at the project in terms of the PA being a new discipline that is going to get integrated within our model. The team really wanted to influence how this would roll out for CHCs. It took a while for people to get used to having a different discipline within the team, but his colleagues are very pleased with his work... The clients are very pleased. They’ve actually been asking to see Stéphane, so that’s quite positive.

Stéphane has definitely helped in addressing the waiting list... There was a learning curve to bring him on board, especially coming to a primary care environment, but he has adapted well.”

Jocelyne Maxwell, Executive Director, Centre de santé communautaire du Temiskaming, Kirkland Lake

Recruiting intensifies as more sites join PA Initiative

With the Physician Assistant Initiative expanding to new sites, staff at the HealthForceOntario Marketing and Recruitment Agency (HFO MRA) are gearing up to attract a new group of PAs to the province.

The initiative is being expanded to more emergency departments across

in the project expansion in January and the successful sites are expected to be announced in March.

At least 20 new PAs will be hired for the expansion and the HFO MRA is confident it can fill the positions. "PAs are an adventurous group of people," said Laurie Skinner, Physician

here, and we offer a nice balance between personal and professional life."

Since the first graduates of civilian PA education programs are not expected until 2010, the HFO MRA targets PAs who are retired from the Canadian Forces or PAs currently working in the United States.

Recruitment tactics will include exhibiting at the American Academy of Physician Assistants conference this May, profiling opportunities on the Canadian Association of Physician Assistants and HealthForceOntario websites, email blasts to physician assistants in border states, and keeping in touch with all PAs who have expressed an interest in working in Ontario since the project started three years ago.

Many friends of PAs in the current projects have contacted the HFO MRA wanting to know how they can be a part of the initiative. If you know a physician assistant who might be interested

in working in Ontario, we'd like to hear from you. Contact the HealthForceOntario Marketing and Recruitment Agency at: pa@healthforceontario.ca.

the province in an effort to help reduce wait times and improve access to emergency service. Hospitals were invited to participate

Assistant Recruitment Advisor: "They're attracted to Ontario because we have a world class health care system, PAs are breaking new ground



Brad Sindair and Charlotte Kirby, of the HealthForceOntario Marketing and Recruitment Agency, speak with a physician assistant at last year's American Academy of Physician Assistants conference in San Antonio, Texas.

The physician assistant role was announced in May 2006 with the launch of HealthForceOntario, the government's health human resources strategy. The goal of HealthForceOntario is to give the people of Ontario access to the right number and mix of qualified healthcare providers, now and in the future.

The PA initiative is being led by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ontario Medical Association. They are joined by the Ontario Hospital Association and the Association of Ontario Health Centres in introducing physician assistants to healthcare teams at sites across the province.

Contact information

For more information about the PA initiative, search "physician assistant" at www.healthforceontario.ca