

# Lost in Translation: Improving the Flow of Information Between Physicians at Niagara Health

Jacqueline Gates<sup>1</sup>, Anushka Lalwani<sup>1</sup>, Brian Harvey<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Johan Viljoen<sup>2</sup>, Jane Doan<sup>2</sup>, Virginia Pullar<sup>2</sup>, Caroline Bourque-Wiley<sup>2</sup>, Nancy Fletcher<sup>2</sup>, Madelyn P. Law<sup>1</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>Brock University, Department of Health Sciences, <sup>2</sup>Niagara Health

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## BACKGROUND

- Nearly **70% of sentinel** events are caused by **breakdowns in communication** between physicians.<sup>1</sup>
- An effort to increase **communication of vital, clinical information** about patients during transfers from **one physician to another** using the **physician transfer of accountability (PTOA)** tool.
- PTOA has been identified as a key **Strategic Initiative** at Niagara Health to create a time-stamped, accountable PTOA procedure within a complex multi-site, not-for-profit, and publicly funded hospital system.
- PTOA is a **Required Organizational Practice (ROP)** according to **Accreditation Canada**. Successful completion of this ROP must be achieved in the **November 2019 Accreditation Cycle at Niagara Health**.

It's about being responsible to the patient, it's about being responsible to society, and responsive to the profession.<sup>2</sup>

- Leslie Flynn, MMus, MD, CCFP, FRCPC

## PROJECT AIM

To evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of a new, electronic PTOA process at **Niagara Health (NH)**, leading to an improvement in the transfer of patient information between physicians at Niagara Health by **April 2019**.

## CHANGES MADE

- 1 Physician job shadow to assess pre-TOA transfer process.
- 2 Interviews with physicians to gather opinions on barriers/motivators to PTOA tool usage.
- 3 PTOA tool modification based on physician feedback.
- 4 Design and distribution of 'When to use PTOA' pocket-cards.
- 5 Updated data collection parameters highlighting tool usage per unit and service.
- 6 Addition of 'When to use PTOA' posters to physician frequented areas.
- 7 Investigation of a parallel charting tool preventing use of PTOA in Internal Medicine.
- 8 Preliminary chart audits evaluating the quality and content of completed tools.

## NEXT STEPS

Future work on this initiative will focus on emphasizing **physician, ancomengagementdmunication, buy-in**, through:

- An email notification process whereby physicians will receive an ITC-enabled reminder to complete a PTOA tool during transfer of a patient.
- Identification of physician champions to promote PTOA tool usage and awareness.
- Presentation of collected data on PTOA tool usage at physician meetings to encourage participation.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Although PTOA is a ROP, implementation has still been challenging.
- Implementation of multiple PDSA cycles helped to identify gaps that were missing.
- Physicians appreciate the need for the tool, but have ingrained work processes that are difficult to modify.
- Communication with physicians must highlight the benefits of PTOA to both physicians and their patients.

References available upon request.