

# The Access Improvement Report

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*A Quarterly Newsletter from Alberta Health Services' Access Improvement Team*

## Program Updates

### Alberta Netcare eReferral

On July 18, 2019, **Family Medicine - Transgender Care** was added to eReferral Advice Request province-wide. Physicians and clinical support staff can now submit non-urgent transgender health general consultation questions and receive a response from a specialist within five calendar days.

New **system enhancements** were also introduced to eReferral in July. These updates directly relate to the standard Advice Request form, some workflows and some worklists, and make it easier for users to search for information. For example, you can now search for PHN/ULI in some worklists on the *Triage* and *My Assigned Referrals* dashboards, and you can now specify when filling out an Advice Request whether you are looking for a referral or for advice. For more information about these enhancements, read the [information notice](#).

On Oct. 17, 2019, several changes were made to Alberta Netcare to accommodate the integration of Connect Care, AHS' new Clinical Information System (CIS). These changes also effect eReferral and specifically how Alberta Netcare documents are linked to new eReferral requests. An information notice detailing these changes is posted to the [eReferral](#) website.

On Oct. 22, General Surgery in the Edmonton Zone also went live with eReferral Advice Request. This service provides non-urgent advice for colorectal, gallbladder, hernia, benign breast tumor, suspected breast cancer, suspected gastrointestinal cancer and other general surgery-related issues.

Finally, in October, eReferral surpassed 40,000 submitted requests. Within a period of six months, requests went from 30,000 to 40,000. Thank you to everyone who has submitted eReferral requests and made this achievement possible!

### QuRE

In our June *Access Improvement Report*, we shared that we were working with four community EMR vendors to add the QuRE-informed referral template into their systems. As of early July, referring providers can now find the "QuRE-Consultation-Referral-Request-and-Response" template in TELUS Wolf, TELUS PS Suite, TELUS MedAccess and QHR Accuro. Providers can use this template to create high-quality referral letters and attach them as a PDF to an eReferral Advice Request or Consult Request, or they can print and fax/mail them to specialty clinics. Quick References will be developed for how to locate/use the new template in each EMR and will be posted on the [QuRE](#) and [eReferral](#) websites soon.

QuRE is also expanding its scope and has begun developing patient resources, including a checklist patients can use when meeting with family/referring doctors and specialists. This work is being finalized, and is scheduled to be posted on the [QuRE](#) website later this fall/winter.

Stay tuned for our next newsletter that will be distributed in early 2020. If you have any questions about the work we're doing, please email us at [access.ereferral@ahs.ca](mailto:access.ereferral@ahs.ca)



### Get in Touch with Access Improvement

If you have questions, email us at [access.ereferral@ahs.ca](mailto:access.ereferral@ahs.ca)

For more information about eReferral, including training support, visit [eReferral online](#)

For more about QuRE and the Alberta Referral Pathways, visit [Access Improvement](#)

### Unsubscribe

If you'd like to unsubscribe from this newsletter, email [access.ereferral@ahs.ca](mailto:access.ereferral@ahs.ca)

### Stay Tuned

The next edition of the *Access Improvement Report* will be released in early 2020.

For questions about Access Improvement, email [access.ereferral@ahs.ca](mailto:access.ereferral@ahs.ca)

# 40,000 eReferral requests received!

In Oct. 2019, we received our 40,000<sup>th</sup> eReferral request. We went from 30,000 to 40,000 in **just six months!**



## eReferral Training

We offer **in-person** training sessions. To book yours, email [access.ereferral@ahs.ca](mailto:access.ereferral@ahs.ca)

For other eReferral training resources:

1. Visit the [Alberta Netcare Learning Centre](#)
2. Contact the eHealth Support Services team via [email](#) or call 1-855-643-8649
3. Visit our [website](#)

## Use eReferral Today!

As of Oct. 2019, **23** specialty areas are accepting eReferral Advice Requests, and **48** per cent of Advice Request do not require an in-person referral (data from April 1 – Sept. 30, 2019).

Advice Request Specialties	
Specialty	Zone(s)
Addiction and M H – Addiction Medicine	All
Family Medicine – Transgender Care	All
Internal Med - Adult Gastroenterology	
• Adult Gastroenterology	All
• Colon Cancer Screening	Edmonton, North
• Hepatology Issue	Edmonton, North, South
Internal Med - Cardiology	Calgary, Central
Internal Med - Endocrinology	Calgary
Internal Med - General Internal Medicine	Calgary
Internal Med - Infectious Disease	Edmonton
Internal Med - Pulmonary Medicine	Calgary
OBS-GYN - Maternal Fetal Medicine	Edmonton
Nephrology	Calgary, Edmonton
Neuro Surgery - Spinal Neurosurgery	Calgary
Neurology	Calgary
OBS-GYN	Calgary
Ophthalmology (Adult and Paeds)	All
Otolaryngology	Central
Pain Medicine - Chronic Pain	Calgary
Palliative Care Medicine	Calgary
Paediatrics – Community Paediatrics	Calgary
Psychiatry – Child and Adolescent	Calgary, Central (patients in Red Deer and south), South
Surgery – General Surgery	Edmonton
Surgery – General Surgery (Breast Health)	Calgary
Urology ( <i>Adult only</i> )	Central, Edmonton

There are 12 service areas accepting eReferral Consult Requests at 43 facilities across Alberta.

Consult Request Specialties	
Specialty	Zone(s)
Adult Gastroenterology (Fit + Non SCOPE)	Edmonton
Internal Med - Pulmonary Medicine	Calgary
Internal Med - Sleep Medicine	Calgary
Internal Med (Tuberculosis Services)	Calgary
Nephrology	Central, Edmonton, North
Oncology – Breast Cancer	All
Oncology – Lung Cancer	All
Orthopaedic Surgery (Hip & Knee Joint Replacement)	Calgary, Edmonton, North, South
Surgery - General Surgery (Breast Health)	Calgary
Urology ( <i>Adult only</i> )	Edmonton

For a complete list of specialties with their reasons for referral, visit eReferral [online](#).

# What We Can Learn from Our Patients

In May 2019, one of Access Improvement's clinical design leads, Gordon Jones, filtered through hundreds of patient complaints made to AHS Patient Relations in the past six years. What he found was that failed referral processes were a leading factor in preventing patients from getting the care that they need.

"We often look at processes and providers, but this gives us the other side of the referral experience," he says.

Gordon identified four key areas that affect patient experiences: lack of transparency, communication breakdown, dysfunctional systems and "the black hole."

The latter could be described as a referral going into limbo—it's been faxed, mailed or called in, but got lost somewhere along the line. This results in an inability to communicate information to the patient, distress on their part, and overall, delayed access to care.

"We know that faxed referrals cause problems, not because the technology is outdated, but because when the referral system fails, patients are harmed."

He references his own unfortunate experience with referral processes when his mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

"Due to wait-time uncertainty, she was referred to two separate doctors, both of whom came to different diagnoses. This added additional confusion to an already stressful situation. It would have saved my mum a lot of time and suffering without this added complication."

Stories like these are what Access Improvement is trying to prevent. Just recently, the Quality Referral Evolution ([QuRE](#)) committee expanded their focus and began developing patient resources.



"From our own research, including these patient complaints, patients and caregivers want to be part of the conversation," says Gordon. "Navigating the healthcare system can be overwhelming. We wanted to create resources that could help patients ask the right questions when meeting with doctors and know what to expect when encountering the consultation-referral process."

Two resources have been developed – a *Patient Handbook* and a *Patient Checklist*. The *Patient Handbook* has handy information patients and caregivers can use when meeting with referring providers and specialists, while the *Patient Checklist* includes questions to ask doctors (including referring providers and specialists) during appointments. Both of these resources are currently being reviewed by AHS Patient and Family Advisors and external stakeholders, and will be posted on the [QuRE](#) website this fall/winter.

Are you a resident or practicing physician who has used QuRE? Complete our [survey](#) so we can support future learning opportunities.

For more information, please email [access.ereferral@ahs.ca](mailto:access.ereferral@ahs.ca)



## A Champion for Transgender Health

Dr. Ted Jablonski bridges knowledge gaps with eReferral Advice Request

“I know nothing about transgender care, how can I help?”

This was the response that Dr. Ted Jablonski gave when he was first asked to take on a transgender patient. Despite being unfamiliar with the field, he agreed to help.

Now—10 years and 600 transgender patients later—Dr. Jablonski is dedicating the rest of his career to supporting trans folks in the community by helping them find support services, providing hormonal management therapy and managing their pre and post-operative care.

Dr. Jablonski’s work has led him to be an award-winning family physician and well-known speaker, trainer, media spokesperson and educator. On top of this, he now offers his expertise on Alberta Netcare eReferral Advice Request.

“A lot of transgender care is uncharted territory for doctors,” says Dr. Jablonski. “Sometimes somebody who has a bit more expertise, has seen a few more cases, can be very, very helpful.”

While there is still uncertainty surrounding transgender care and its many complexities, Dr. Jablonski has been hearing more and more positive stories where Alberta’s physicians are getting it right. He believes this to be the result of the development of partnerships and alliances within the community which have helped elevate the education of all.

“Everyone is trying to work together,” he says. “eReferral now becomes a partnership between family doctors and transgender care specialists, so we can work together to help patients.”

“Even though we’ve never worked together in the same clinic, we know each other, and we know of the work we’re all doing. It’s all alliance.”

And once patients have begun their transitional journey?

“They seem to come out of a dark place and see the light,” says Dr. Jablonski. “They transform and become more vibrant. They become a more vital and visible part of the community.”

*Thank you, Dr. Jablonski, for giving Access Improvement the opportunity to share this story!*

*“They seem to come out of a dark place and see the light. They transform and become more vibrant.”*

- Dr. Ted Jablonski

To learn more about transgender health, Dr. Jablonski recommends the following resources:

- [Rainbow Health Ontario](#)
- [Sherbourne Health](#)
- [TOP Alberta Guidelines](#)

Transgender Care went live on eReferral Advice Request on July 18, 2019 province-wide. Physicians and clinical support staff can now submit non-urgent transgender health general consultation questions and receive a response within five calendar days.

To learn how to create an Advice Request, visit the [Alberta Netcare Learning Centre](#). For a list of all specialties available for eReferral Advice and Consult Requests, go [online](#).





## eReferral from the Perspective of a Unit Clerk

We often share how eReferral improves referral practices for physicians, but what about the support staff who account for approximately 57 per cent of submitting users?

This month, we are speaking with Rosemarie Jarvis, a unit clerk in Pulmonary Medicine at Calgary's South Health Campus (SHC). Pulmonary Medicine went live with eReferral Consult Request in Dec. 2018, so we wanted to know how the system is working for her so far.

Rosemarie has been a unit clerk at SHC since 2012. She sends two-to-three referrals to subspecialties every day, and eReferral has made this task a lot easier. Specifically, she loves that it's all done electronically, and she receives up-to-date tracking on each referral.

"It's so much faster. All the paperwork is there, and I can just go through Alberta Netcare to submit a referral. I know when it's been processed, I know when it's been triaged and I know what the wait times are," she says. "That's what's most important to me."

One of eReferral's many benefits is that it does away with traditional referral processes such as faxing or mailing referrals.

"Before eReferral, we would do all of this manually. I would fax documents out, but I wouldn't know what happened after that," she says. "Our doctors were concerned that the patient's care was being jeopardized."

She also explains that some of these older processes are still being used, and it takes up a lot of time that could be spent on other important tasks that will help her unit.

"We have to fax back and forth, and go through so many different channels. It's very time-consuming. If they go through eReferral, it's done right away."

Overall, Rosemarie notes that eReferral is not only a benefit to her, but the doctors she works with love it too.

"Both [of our doctors] love it because it benefits everyone: patients and clinics. For patients, they get to be seen faster. For us, we can send out referrals more efficiently, we don't have to wait and we get faster results."

## QuRE is Spreading

Quality Referral Evolution (QuRE) continues gaining momentum as more medical communities outside of Alberta are taking note of the work being done.

[The Kootenay Boundary Division of Family Practice](#) has recently partnered with the QuRE committee to share the [QuRE Referral and Consultation Checklists](#) with primary care physicians in the Kootenays and surrounding areas.

This is the second out-of-province group to join the initiative, with [eHealth Saskatchewan](#) adopting the Checklist last year.

"We're excited that this partnership between provinces is continuing to build," says Annabelle Wong, QuRE committee chair. "It brings us one step closer to building a national community of practice for enhanced communication in consultation-referral processes."

The QuRE Checklist is an evidence-informed tool that creates best-practice ideas for referral and consultation notes. To learn more, visit [QuRE](#) online.

Are you a resident or practicing physician who has used QuRE? Complete our [survey](#) so we can support future learning opportunities.

## eReferral Research Community of Practice

Starting in Jan. 2020, we would like to build a Community of Practice (CoP) to share research ideas and opportunities related to eReferral.

This CoP will be co-chaired by Dr. Aminu Bello from the Division of Nephrology in Edmonton and Annabelle Wong from Access Improvement.

If you are interested in participating, email [access.ereferral@ahs.ca](mailto:access.ereferral@ahs.ca)

# In the news

Read what others are saying about Access Improvement initiatives

## Frustrated by Poor Quality Referrals? An Easy-to-Use Solution is Spreading

*In June, the newly-launched Joule website featured QuRE on their blog.*

“What if I told you the most common piece of missing information on a referral form is a clear reason for referral? With an average of [two million](#) referrals per year sent to the 5,405 specialists in Alberta, the burden of poor quality referrals can add up quickly.

Just one piece of missing information when referring a patient to another physician can delay a patient’s access to care. It can mean missed follow-ups, incomplete adherence to recommendations, duplicated services—and more paperwork for already busy physicians. When it comes to poor quality referrals, patients and physicians lose out.

A resource to use as a reference is Quality Referral Evolution, or QuRE’s (pronounced ‘cure’), evidence-informed [Checklist](#)—once printed, it fits right in your pocket.” *Read the full article [here](#)*

## Improving Alberta’s Referral Experience

*In their summer edition, CARE Magazine from the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta featured eReferral in their quarterly magazine.*

“Ms. Thompson’s referral was sent via fax to a nearby specialist. However, the power went out at the specialist’s office during the time the fax was sent. When the Referral Coordinator in your workplace phoned to check on its status, they determined the referral had never been received. Because the referral never made it, a new referral has to be sent and Ms. Thompson’s care is delayed.” *Read the full article [here](#)*

**Do you have an Access Improvement story idea?** Email [access.ereferral@ahs.ca](mailto:access.ereferral@ahs.ca) and we’d be happy to discuss adding your feature into our next newsletter!

## Quick References for QuRE-Informed Referral Templates Coming Soon!

If you use QHR Accuro, TELUS Med Access, TELUS PS Suite or TELUS Wolf, there is a new referral template available.

These QuRE-informed templates will help you create high-quality referrals to specialists. Completed forms can be sent through your EMR or printed to PDF and attached to an eReferral request.

Quick References for how to locate and use these forms are being finalized. Stay tuned to our [QuRE](#) and [eReferral](#) websites for these links coming soon.

## Updated eReferral Billing Amounts

Did you know that referring and responding providers who use eReferral Advice Request can bill for their requests? The Alberta Medical Association has recently updated their billing amounts to:

- Referring Providers: 03.01R=\$33.28 (previously \$32.43).
- Receiving Providers: 03.01O=\$68.65 (previously \$76.27)

For more information about billing codes, visit the Alberta Medical Association’s [Fee Navigator](#) website.

*Important note:* eReferral Consult Requests are not eligible for billing.

# Who's Who — Access Improvement

This is your chance to get to know the hardworking team behind eReferral, QuRE and Alberta Referral Pathways.

This month we speak with **Javix Thomas**, our Change Management Analyst in Edmonton.

## What do you do on the Access Improvement team?

As a change management analyst, I support specialties and primary care clinics after they adopt eReferral by helping them add an electronic workflow to their existing fax process. My primary responsibility is to assess and document the current workflow process and develop future state processes for eReferral use.

## How is your role helping transform Alberta's referral experience?

Each time I help someone become comfortable using eReferral, I am increasing the amount of referral information transparently available to all Alberta Netcare users. This also improves patient care and safety, as the use of eReferral greatly enhances the quality of referral processes.

## What's a fun fact about yourself?

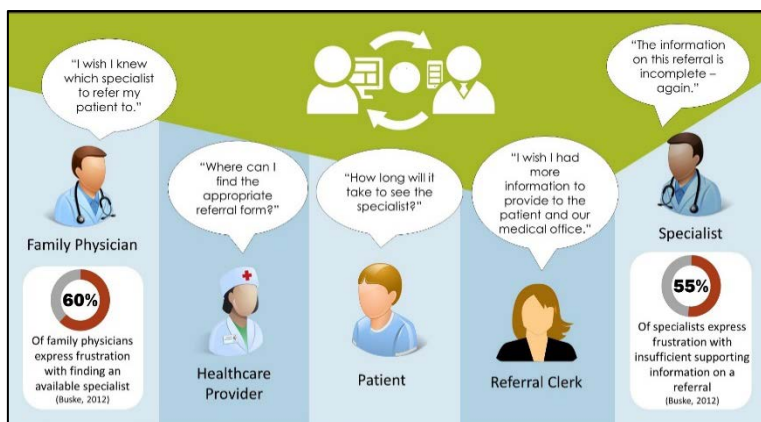
Outside of work, I love listening to music and spending time with family.



*"Nothing ever happens in the world that does not happen first inside the human heart."*

- Fulton J. Sheen

## Alberta Referral Directory



Streamline your referral process with the Alberta Referral Directory, AHS' designated system of record for referral information. The ARD can be accessed at [albertareferraldirectory.ca](http://albertareferraldirectory.ca) and does not require a password to search and view content.

Sources: Reference: Buske, L. (2012, August). Experiences with Referrals: Results of two surveys. Canadian Collaborative Centre for Physician Resources. Retrieved from <https://www.cma.ca>

## What We're Reading

Find out what our team is reading to stay up-to-date on access initiatives and healthcare technology across the country.

- [Honest Conversations: 1. Setting the Stage](#)
- [Electronic Advice Request System for Nephrology in Alberta: Pilot Results & Implementation](#)
- [Electronic Consults in Otolaryngology...](#)
- [Innovative Program Improves Patient Access to Specialist Medical Advice in Primary Care Across Canada](#)
- [A Sea-Change is About to Hit Primary Care as Virtual Visits Increase](#)
- [CMPA Assessment of eConsult](#)

Do you have an article to share? Send it to [access.ereferral@ahs.ca](mailto:access.ereferral@ahs.ca) and we may feature it next edition!

