

Virtual Solutions for Palliative Care

A report released by Health Quality Ontario, *Palliative Care at the End of Life (2016)*, found that although most Ontarians prefer to receive palliative care at home, more than 50 per cent of deaths occur in hospitals. Most palliative care patients are admitted to or die in hospital in their last 30 days of life. The report also found that caregivers, who play a critical role for patients with a terminal or chronic illness, experience burnout, which is a key contributor to trips to the emergency room in the last stages of life. With 40 per cent more deaths expected each year by 2020, there is an increased demand for palliative care.

Virtual palliative care can help enhance patient-centred care, further Ontario's digital health goals and contribute to the following:

- Convenient and timely access to care for patients.
- Maintenance and enhancement of continuity of care through improved communication.
- Increased patient satisfaction and experience, and likelihood of dying at home.
- Decrease in emergency department visits and hospital admissions.
- Additional support for caregivers.

Both Health Quality Ontario Palliative Care Standards and Ontario Palliative Care Network Health Service Delivery Framework recommend virtual care as options to improve the care of patients with life-limiting illnesses.

About the Virtual Palliative Care program

The Virtual Palliative Care program includes a platform with flexible protocols that provide real time assessment of patient status. Data is submitted by patients wherever they are through mobile digital devices, and providers are alerted when changes in the patient's condition identify a need for a change in their care plan. Many patients would benefit from the program as it is:

- **Personalized:** It makes receiving care at a preferred location as simple as possible by enabling patient-driven care through mobile powered virtual care technology.
- **Home possible:** Remote home monitoring means less time spent travelling to appointments, reduced unnecessary transfer to acute care/hospitals, and less emergency room visits.
- **Interactive:** Health assessments that focus on symptoms and quality of life are submitted by patients and sent to the palliative care team in real time to better manage outcomes.
- **Monitored:** A palliative care team member can help monitor patient conditions at a distance; if any readings suggest a change, they will contact the patient to identify the problem, find a solution, and connect with others on the care team.

Support from OTN

OTN is available to work with palliative care teams across Ontario to identify their needs and implement the program into their specific environment to improve the patient care experience. OTN can also help health care organizations design and implement solution agnostic virtual palliative care. We have developed a Virtual Palliative Care protocol and a Virtual Palliative Care Toolkit, available to support planning, implementation and evaluation.

To find out more about implementing palliative virtual care, contact OTN: innovation@otn.ca or visit otn.ca/providers