

CHARD makes finding referral resources easy

Do you struggle to find the right referral resource for your patient? The Community Healthcare and Resource Directory (CHARD) is a multi-year initiative of the General Practice Services Committee aimed at improving patient referrals. A comprehensive, searchable resource directory, CHARD provides physicians and their teams with information on specialists, allied health practitioners, and community health services and programs to help ensure that patients are referred to the most appropriate and available resource.

The need for an accurate, up-to-date directory was identified repeatedly during GPSC's Professional Quality Improvement Days in 2005. Working to address this need, the GPSC helped CHARD progress from a prototype to a continually expanding list of topics and resources accessed via an easy-to-use and intuitive interface searchable by subject or location.

CHARD's last series of resources will be added in March 2012, completing the directory across all medical topic areas. Over 40 000 resources will be searchable, including specialist and family physicians, public and private programs and services, as well as a number of allied health practitioners covering all areas of BC.

The directory was designed to reduce the time and frustration required to identify an appropriate referral resource, as well as to provide detailed information about any inclusion or exclusion criteria and outlining referral processes for that provider or service.

"CHARD promises significant benefits for a range of groups. Patients

get referred quite quickly to the appropriate care provider, and GPs and their staff have a list of patient care resources at their fingertips," says Dr David Attwell, family physician.

Dr Frank Egan, a Victoria-area family physician, discovered how quickly and easily he was able to access local resources in CHARD. "I had one of my patients, a young lady who needed help with an eating disorder," says Dr Egan. "Given her age, it wasn't immediately clear where to refer her for further help." Dr Egan searched CHARD and was pleased to see a number of nearby resources. "The detailed listings provided me with information about the service and the type of treatment provided. I was also able to access their referral form," notes Dr Egan. "In a matter of a few clicks I had all the information I needed to make a decision, as well as a great deal of information about the provider so that I could have a meaningful conversation with the patient."

CHARD has proven an effective and efficient tool in Dr Egan's practice. "CHARD helps me find local referral resources in an efficient, time-saving manner, and information in the directory is kept current. It has a nice printable interface, so I can give my patient not only the name of the resource and the location but also a map, hours of operation, and a description of the service."

Built by physicians for physicians, CHARD is a useful and relevant tool for busy practices, and the aim is to ensure that this continues. Each year since the prototype was developed in 2009 has seen the addition of new medical topic areas and a growth in the overall resources listed in the directory, steadily increasing at a rate of over 10 000 new referral resources each year.

The first of its kind in Canada, the directory was carefully shaped and improved through dialogue with physicians and a variety of clinical leaders in the province. A series of ongoing focus group sessions were held, and more than 300 stakeholders and users in local communities across BC were provided the opportunity to learn about CHARD, evaluate the comprehensiveness of their local data, and provide suggestions for improvement.

Early feedback was key to designing the cleaner, more intuitive interface that was launched in March 2011. The new look of CHARD simplified the process of sorting through data, enabling users to quickly zero in on a desired referral resource. Additional tools allowed for detailed and specific searches for more esoteric resources in the province. Speed and performance were also enhanced through further technological improvements. "I hadn't used the system in a while and was pleasantly surprised at how much it had improved," reports one CHARD user. "There were so many more resources and it was easy to navigate."

Attracting over 1000 new users in the last year, CHARD has found a place in the BC health care system. Physicians and medical office assistants are benefiting from a referral process that requires less time, effort, and frustration. Contact information, referral forms, and detailed clinical information is delivered quickly and easily through one central tool. Setting up a CHARD account takes just a few minutes.

To learn more, including how to get your office signed up, visit www.info.chardbc.ca or call 1 877 330-7322.

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This article is the opinion of the GPSC and has not been peer reviewed by the BCMJ Editorial Board.