

The page features a decorative graphic on the right side consisting of three overlapping circles of varying sizes, each with a dark blue center and a lighter blue outer ring. Two thin, light blue lines intersect at the top left and extend diagonally across the page, framing the circles.

# Patient Empowerment: The Key to Renewing Canada's Health Care System

Using Electronic Health Records and a Client  
Response Tab to Improve and Sustain the Health  
of Canadians

Submission to the Health Council of Canada

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**12/15/2009**

Faced with the continuous question of how to sustain our Canadian healthcare system, I feel that the answer can no longer come from increased funding or increased criticism of our approaches to care. Instead, the solutions must come from us as Canadians: we must begin to see ourselves as our greatest resource for health. It is undeniable that for the past decade, our healthcare spending has been booming. Although population growth and population aging are often diagnosed as the culprits behind escalating spending and demand on our system, it is proven to be increased usage of the healthcare services by Canadians that is pushing our healthcare system to its limits (Health Council of Canada, 2009). This means that today, we are having more things done to and for us, with this trend only continuing to increase. In the past, health policy has been specifically centered on meeting the needs of those who are ill. However, in order to renew and invigorate the Canadian healthcare system, there must be a focus on empowering Canadians to become responsible and dedicated leaders in their own health by using health services more effectively and proactively.

The already established framework of the Canada Health Infoway can be used as the direct avenue to empowering Canadians and promoting good health, preventing illness, and changing health behaviours. The Electronic Health Record is the cornerstone infostructure used to connect health delivery processes and providers, which is paramount to healthcare both today and in the future. Containing critical health information linked throughout jurisdictions, electronic health records are crucial in developing complete and comprehensive care for each Canadian. Furthermore, electronic health records aim to provide patients with a more personalized care and transparency into the status of their health and treatment plans (Canada Health Infoway, 2009).

However, despite this aim of delivering tailored patient care, the most personal part of the health record to the actual individual is the patient identification section. The other key components of the health records include laboratory results, pharmacology, and clinical documentation. It is difficult to truly empower individuals when they ultimately have no input into the record of their health status and treatment. In fact, this further exacerbates the mentality of Canadians that healthcare is supposed to be done to and for them. Instead, physicians must begin to manage care and promote health with greater patient involvement. Active communication and collaboration between patient and physician will then strengthen an ongoing and continuing relationship. As a result, the current electronic health records must be slightly modified, by adding in a “Client Response Tab”. This would allow for a section of the already established health approach to be solely dedicated to the feedback of the patient, and to be continuously recorded and monitored.

Common and modifiable risk factors underlie a number of major chronic diseases plaguing Canadians today. Recently, Health Canada provided \$300 million in funding to combat chronic disease with a particular emphasis on modifiable risk factors, such as diet and exercise (Health Canada, 2009). Yet simple patient empowerment can lead to significant increases in accountability and commitment of individuals to being active in their own health. In fact, studies show that when patients are encouraged to express their feelings by healthcare providers about their current health status, it results in long-term patient compliance and satisfaction (Esch et al, 2008). Therefore, encouraging discussion with patients to understand their views and feelings about their health or treatment should be a constant necessity of our health providers. This will then be recorded in the patient's electronic record under the “Client Response Tab” and will allow both the patient and the provider to gain more out of their encounters together. In order to ensure that this innovation is effective and resulting in

positive impacts on the health of Canadians, various metrics could be used to measure changes including patient compliance, reduction of concern, increase in self-management, symptom reduction, and physiologic status.

This innovation would be simple, adding to the establishment of Canada's Health Infoway, but would bring standardized electronic health records into the truly personalized health resource it should be. Allowing more patient involvement can bring Canadians back in control of their health and into being more aware of their overall health through education and self-monitoring. In partnership with their health providers, this innovation would bring the focus back onto the patient, helping Canadians to use their health services more sensibly and consciously. As well, this modification would help to increase the accountability of physicians to be responsible for continuously empowering their patients, and therefore enhancing their health with the services provided. Healthcare providers will then be able to confidently provide superior quality care across the system and improved decision-making support, which are the aims of Canada's Health Infoway. Finally, partnered with their patients and fellow health providers, physicians will be stronger leaders in helping their patients navigate through the system and enabling their patients to manage their own self-care.

Although our healthcare system is straining from unhealthy lifestyle choices and a growing demand for our health services, there is still a great opportunity for change. It is up to us, as empowered patients and health providers, to become dedicated advocates for the health of Canadians. Through modifying an already in place health program, such as Canada's Health Infoway, this would provide a simple, yet effective measure that would help Canadians regain control over their health and renew our burdened system. We truly can be our own answers to our healthcare troubles. And by making a change now, we can keep our system sustainable and true to our Canadian values of equity, fairness, and solidarity.

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