



## Nurses lead change through eHealth technologies

THE FAST PACE OF CHANGE IN OUR increasingly digital world is forcing everyone to re-think how they approach their work. Nursing is no exception. Now, nurses and other health professionals have a new resource to help them adapt.

In February, RNAO released a new best practice guideline (BPG) titled [Adopting eHealth Solutions: Implementation Strategies](#). Its 26 evidence-based recommendations, developed in partnership with Canada Health Infoway, provide implementation strategies that can help ensure our country's health system better adapts to the evolution already underway, and to the changes on the horizon. In my role as chief nursing officer with Toronto Public Health, I have been co-leading the business side of designing and implementing a community health information system for nurses and other professional staff. I am confident RNAO's BPG will be an enormously helpful tool for our organization.

New technologies have the potential to increase efficiency, improve patient safety, and result in better health outcomes. And yet, research shows 70 per cent of eHealth projects undertaken in organizations fail due to leadership shortfalls. This includes: insufficient planning, little change in management, and lack of buy-in.

At the heart of this change is how we, as nurses, engage. Some of you may worry about how a greater reliance on

technology will affect your interactions with patients and clients. Losing the so-called "sounds and touch" of nursing as one nurse described it. The impact on the therapeutic relationship is a valid concern. But that shouldn't deter us from the potential gains that await.

The fact is technology is already transforming health care. Examples include:

electronic medical records, mobile devices, e-counselling, virtually observed therapy, and remote patient monitoring systems, just to name a few. Yet, despite the millions of dollars invested in bringing various health information systems together, we still are not connected the way we can and should be. Technology is key to supporting a whole system approach and to safely sharing important data that will result in improved population health planning and better access to care.

That's why this BPG is important. Strong leadership at all levels of the health system is also crucial. Among the BPG recommendations is the creation of specialized chief nursing information officers (CNIO), considered critical if we want to advance clinical adoption.

Also important is a

recommendation that health organizations establish formal structures that engage health executives, clinicians, and patients through the various steps of implementation. Education and training must be part of the eHealth infrastructure in all health organizations and academic institutions. Nurses and other health professionals should also

providers deliver the integrated care Canadians expect. Key to moving from concept to reality is making sure providers and their patients are engaging in designing and adopting eHealth solutions, leaving no one on the sidelines of change.

There is no end to the change and convenience technology can bring to our work. Wireless systems give nurses the

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assume responsibility for being up-to-date on role-specific eHealth competencies.

Ensuring nurses are part of this change is essential. It's one of the best ways to take stock of how technology is and will continue to change the way we practise, manage and protect the integrity and privacy of personal health information, save time, and avoid errors. But we also must ensure new advances in technology are not burdensome. The changes must not affect the therapeutic relationships we have with our patients and clients.

Technology has enhanced so many aspects of our private lives and we can and should expect similar advances in our health system. This can enable improved communication within and between sectors and services. Provincially, and right across Canada, effective eHealth systems can help

freedom to move around without the worry of being tied to workstations. Technology is a tool that allows for timely point-of-care interactions and real time connections to patients and clients.

Technology is here to stay and its prevalence in nursing and in the health system will continue to grow. Leaders in all roles and sectors must buy in if Canada wants to achieve its eHealth goals. And it's up to us as nurses – from frontline staff to administrators, educators, researchers, and policy makers – to ensure we're fully involved in designing and implementing these new technologies. By doing this together, we optimize the present and help to shape the future of our daily practice. **RN**

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