

Limited access to specialist care remains a major barrier to health care in Canada. The consultation-referral process is complex and involves many factors that can limit the effectiveness and efficiency of patient care. These factors include:

- Long wait times before specialist advice is received/implemented
- Discovering during the visit that preliminary tests should have been ordered, requiring a second visit
- Discovering during the visit that patient issues are better suited to a different type of specialist
- Delayed communication
- Logistical challenges and expenses for the patients

The Champlain BASE (Building Access to Specialists through eConsultation) eConsult Service:

- Is a secure web-based tool that allows primary care providers (PCPs) quick access to speciality care for their patients
- Is easy to use and only requires a standard computer and 30 minutes of virtual training
- Was developed here in the Champlain region by family physician/researcher Dr. Clare Liddy and endocrinologist Dr. Erin Keely in collaboration with the Champlain Local Health Integration Network (LHIN), Bruyère Research Institute, Bruyère Continuing Care, The Ottawa Hospital, and the Winchester District Memorial Hospital
- Provides patient-specific advice to PCPs in place of a face-to-face specialist consultation
- Provides patient-specific advice to PCPs for further investigations or treatment options before a face-to-face consultation, resulting in fewer visits to the specialists
- Provides opportunity for specialists to transition the care of patients back to the PCP community, with an enhanced confidence in the transition process, which promotes continuity of care and follows best practices
- Is continually evaluated to ensure ongoing quality improvement and ensuring the service continues to meet the needs of patients and healthcare professionals

Benefits for the Specialist

- Efficient
- Enables rapid access to specialist
- Improves communication with PCPs
- Provides an opportunity for capacity building/continuing education
- An important part of restructuring care to improve access for patients
- Liability protection through the permanent written record of advice given (see reverse)



**“It is the right thing to do for our patients”
-Ottawa specialist, 2014**

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CMPA Assessment of eConsult

What is an eConsult?

An eConsult occurs when a primary care provider (PCP) electronically sends a question to a specialist. This can be a simple question (e.g., about a drug dosage) or a more complex question following an initial assessment by the PCP (e.g., sending a question with images of the patient for a virtual dermatology assessment). eConsults may avoid the need to refer a patient to a specialist for diagnosis and treatment.



How is an eConsult different from an informal consultation?

In many hospitals, when a PCP has a question about a patient, they are able to approach a colleague and ask for advice. These “hallway consultations” happen frequently and though the PCP often gets the advice needed, there is no audit trail of the consultation. There is also no way for the specialist to get paid.

What is the CMPA’s position on PCPs and specialists using eConsult to provide patient care?

The CMPA has assessed the eConsult flow of care and determined that it provides an opportunity to improve efficiency, enhance patient care, expand access to specialists and provides a clear audit trail of the specialist’s advice given to the PCP for the suggested care of the patient.

Do you need to obtain your patient’s consent prior to requesting an eConsult?

No, patient consent is implied in an eConsult as this interaction remains within the Circle of Care; however, advising your patient of your use of this tool is not a problem either.

Who is the Most Responsible Physician (MRP) during an eConsult?

When using the eConsult service, the PCP remains the MRP for the patient, i.e., when a specialist accepts an eConsult, it does not transfer the responsibility of care or decision making to the specialist as may be the case with a normal referral.

What are the liability considerations for the PCP?

The PCP holds the duty of care to proceed with the eConsult and move the closed eConsult interaction into the patient record.

What are the liability considerations for the specialist?

Similar to the advice given to a PCP through “hallway consultations”, specialists are accountable for any advice given via eConsult for patient care. eConsult provides a clear audit trail linking the specialist advice to the PCP and is subsequently documented in the patient’s record.

Further questions please email eConsult@ontariomd.com