

Ontario eConsult Program

SPECIALISTS

eConsult, a secure web-based tool, enables physicians and nurse practitioners to ask clinical questions to a specialist electronically and receive a response within days, often eliminating the need for an in-person visit.

What is the Ontario eConsult Program?

The Ontario eConsult Program, with the support of the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care, integrates two successful initiatives: BASE™ Managed Specialty model and the Ontario Telemedicine Network's (OTN) Direct to Specialist model. The program includes 4 services: Champlain BASE™ regional service, Ontario eConsult service, Teledermatology and Teleophthamology.



How is an eConsult different from an informal consultation?

In many organized care settings, when a Primary Care Provider (PCP) has a question about a patient, they are able to approach a colleague and ask for advice. These "hallway conversations" happen frequently and though the requesting provider often gets the advice needed, there is no formal documentation of the consultation. There is also no way for the specialist to get paid.

What are the benefits to specialists?

- Allows prompt, high quality communication with requesting providers, including those outside of the specialist's region, reducing geographical inequities
- Provides opportunities for knowledge sharing and increased capacity in primary care
- Offers liability protection through the permanent written record of advice provided
- Offers the opportunity to use eConsult to access advice from other specialists
- Is an important part of restructuring care to improve equitable access for patients

Is being an eConsult specialist right for me?

Specialists enrolled with the Ontario eConsult program are expected to:

- Be experienced practitioners in good standing with their regulatory body
- Respond to requesting provider questions within 7 days (median response time is 2 days) through OTNhub.ca
- Have an interest in providing collegial, educational replies
- Contribute to a community of practice with requesting providers in their region

Who is the Most Responsible Provider (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 traditional referral.

What are the liability considerations for the specialist?

A physician may create a duty of care by providing advice on a patient. This can be done via a face-to-face visit with the patient, or a communication (call, email, eConsult) with another physician or nurse provider.

In the case of an eConsult, a specialist providing information is expected to gather the appropriate information (if available), and use it to provide sound medical advice. The advising specialist retains the same responsibilities around appropriate and complete clinical guidance as with a traditional consultation, even though they may not know the name of the patient or have met them face-to-face.

How are family physicians, nurse practitioners and specialists compensated for using eConsult?

Services that are part of the Ontario eConsult Program are available at no cost to the patient and the provider. Where applicable, family physicians can bill OHIP for the consult request using the K738 fee code (Ontario Schedule of Benefits). A K738 Clarification Guide has been published by the Ontario Medical Association Economics Department to assist physicians in correctly using the code. Specialists providing services on eConsult are paid an hourly rate of \$200, pro-rated based on the length of time it takes to complete an eConsult.

Specialist Perspectives

"Personally rewarding because I learn as I go. It is gratifying to be able to help a colleague and patient without the bother of an unnecessary consult visit and the wait involved in that. Colleagues seem very grateful for the help."

"An excellent service overall. I understand how tough it can be as a PCP to deal with the huge number of problems they see, and the concern about timeliness of consults or even the need for a consult. This fills that gap."

"I am not a health economist, but this modality of health care delivery is likely more cost-effective by decreasing travel time and time away from work for patients who do not normally have access to specialist care in rural areas and even urban areas where wait time for live consults is measured in months."