

Alberta has the Ingredients to Propel Health System Advancements



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When it comes to harnessing research and innovation to drive health system improvement, Alberta Health Services (AHS) and its partners are poised to lead the way in Canada.

As the country's largest health authority with more than 100,000 staff, 15,000 volunteers and 9,000 physician partners serving the needs of more than four million Albertans, AHS is leveraging research and innovation to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

Just ask someone like Garry Laxdal, a 54-year-old Calgary man who was diagnosed with cancer in 2015.

Mr. Laxdal took part in a new Alberta program for patients undergoing colorectal surgery that helps them prepare and recover from surgery faster. Through the program, patients spend less time in hospital, have fewer complications and fewer return visits after discharge.

"Immediately after my surgery I felt great," Mr. Laxdal recalls. "In fact, I joked to my wife, 'This wasn't so bad; I don't know what all the fuss was about.' I was back up on my feet the evening of my surgery and then discharged six days later. I felt fabulous. In fact, I would have gone home on Day 5 if they would have let me."

Mr. Laxdal's relatively smooth encounter with major surgery was a

result of a program called Enhanced Recovery After Surgery (ERAS), which is the application of international evidence-based ways of providing care before, during and after surgery.

Patients love it because they are part of the team throughout the process and kept well informed about their entire surgery journey.

The results for the health system have been no less remarkable. ERAS began in 2013 for colorectal surgery patients and has spread to six different hospitals in the province, with more planned. To date we estimate a savings to the Alberta health system of about \$3.6 million.

To develop, implement and spread innovative best practices like these requires a mechanism that brings together clinicians, academic researchers, administrators, policy-makers and, most importantly,

patients and families, who are passionate and knowledgeable about specific areas of health.

To accomplish this AHS created 13 (soon to be 15) Strategic Clinical Networks™ (SCNs) to bring about innovative ways of delivering care that will provide better quality, better outcomes and better value for every Albertan.

They are focused on identifying priorities for improved health outcomes, research, driving innovation, eliminating unnecessary variations in care across the province, and promoting sustainability by ensuring we get the most value out of every health dollar.

SCNs would not be possible without having a single, provincewide health system. The support of our partners – Alberta Innovates, the Universities of Alberta, Lethbridge and Calgary, and many other private

partners and not-for-profit agencies – is instrumental in advancing the research and innovation agenda.

Take ERAS, for example. Not only has ERAS spread beyond the six hospital sites in which it started, but guidelines are also being introduced for several other surgical procedures in several other sites.

The SCNs have brought about other significant improvements. For example, we've introduced guidelines for the appropriate use of anti-psychotics in every long-term care facility in Alberta (170 sites), which have become a model for the country. More than 1,000 of our frail elderly are no longer receiving unnecessary medications and staff have reported positive changes from this approach.

Together, these and many other SCN initiatives are having a significant impact on the Alberta

health system and outcomes for Albertans.

Data and information are key to making the best evidence-informed decisions possible. We've made major strides since our formation in 2008 to consolidate and link provincial data to help answer public health questions that are difficult to answer elsewhere.

Fully embedding research and innovation in the health system improves outcomes at both the individual and population levels, and helps us live out our AHS vision: Healthy Albertans. Healthy Communities. Together.

We know we're not alone in our efforts to improve health system performance. We draw from the best practices being generated in other systems across the country. Canadians are the ultimate beneficiaries when all of us share and adopt innovations.