

DIAGNOSTIC IMAGING REFERRALS AT LOCAL HOSPITALS GO ELECTRONIC

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WATERLOO REGION

Patients who need an X-ray, MRI or CT scan can expect shorter waits and less hassle now that all of Waterloo Region's hospitals are using electronic referrals for Diagnostic Imaging.

The aim is to improve the patient experience, and cut down on delays, lost referrals and missed appointments.

"There's no telephone tag back and forth," said Dr. Mohamed Alarakhia, director of the eHealth Centre of Excellence. "It will reduce the time to referral."

Grand River Hospital, St. Mary's General Hospital and Cambridge Memorial Hospital are among seven hospitals in Waterloo-Wellington now processing Diagnostic Imaging referrals electronically.

"It's going to cut down on a lot of the administrative work," Alarakhia said.

That's good news for both patients and health-care providers.

Before, patients could wait weeks to hear back about their appointment — and it could feel like their referral went into a "black hole."

Electronic referrals give patients the option of being notified by email throughout the booking process.

"It gives them the ability to see into what is happening," Alarakhia said.

The patient can also confirm the appointment directly from the email, and they get all the relevant information including how to prepare for the test and where to park.

"It's in one spot," he said.

Patients pick their preferred site for the testing. Work is underway to include wait times as part of their decision about where to go.

Cambridge Memorial implemented e-referrals in late 2015, and its experience provided valuable insights to the regionwide launch last week. So far, 200 Diagnostic Imaging referrals have been made by 54 providers.

Work continues to roll out the new system and engage more health-care providers.

"We're quite excited about getting every provider on board," Alarakhia said.

For now the referrals are for testing at the hospitals but the plan is to include independent health facilities that offer Diagnostic Imaging.

Before hospitals had their own referral forms that were filled out and faxed in by the doctor's office. Now there's one form and everything is done electronically, including updating the patient's medical record.

"It's a seamless experience," Alarakhia said.

"That means consistent instructions for patients."

Electronic referrals are also being used in the region for orthopedics, diabetes and chronic disease management.

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