

PROJECT FACT SHEET

From the Public's Perspective: Assessing Primary Care in Capital Health

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In recent years, primary care has emerged at the heart of health care reform planning across Canada. Traditionally, family doctors are responsible for providing primary care, which encompasses a wide range of issues including diagnosis and treatment of illness, disease prevention, and health promotion. The majority of residents living in the Capital Health district have a regular family physician they visit to seek health advice. Until recently, however, little was known about the consumer's perspective on the quality of that care.

An innovative new survey has helped to change that. In partnership with Capital District, family physician Fred Burge and his team have developed a means of assessing patients' satisfaction with the care they receive from their primary health care provider.

The Primary Care Practice Survey (PCPS) was adapted from a UK tool for our Canadian setting and administered to 1,607 Halifax residents through telephone interviews. "To our knowledge, it is the first survey ever administered to a large population in Canada that assessed the quality of primary care from the consumer's perspective," says Dr. Burge.

The survey gathered information on such essential issues as wait times for appointments, thoroughness and consistency of care, advice on the prevention of illness, and the kind of support patients receive from their doctors to cope with their health problems.

Information gathered from the survey paints an overall picture of primary care in the Halifax area. The PCPS indicates that access to family physicians is good: 97% of the people interviewed reported that they have a regular family doctor and that they see a family practitioner in 99% of their visits to the doctor's office. Respondents to the survey also indicated that their relationship with their family doctor is a long-term one, with 14 years being the average length of time spent in the care of one doctor.

"Continuity of care, communication with family physicians, the enabling of patients, and overall satisfaction are all good," says Dr. Burge.

He also points out that the PCPS captured information about some areas of primary care in the Capital Health region that may require greater focus for improvement: "Elements of access, more

focus on prevention, and the creation of interdisciplinary teams including, for example, physicians, nurses, and dieticians, need more attention.”

Information gathered by the Primary Care Practice Survey has helped establish important baseline measures of primary care that can be used by health authorities in Nova Scotia to measure changes in health care delivery as they are implemented. The Department of Health’s Evaluation Working Group on Primary Health Care has already adopted the tool, a clear indication of the PCPS’s value and timeliness.

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