

Dear Colleague,

Access to health care continues to be one of the most talked about issues in medicine today, with wait times for specialists and emergency care being the focus. Unfortunately, primary care is not excused from this challenge, as many patients have to wait **2 weeks or more to see their own physician**. This creates a cascade of issues for physicians, patients, staff and the health care system as a whole, ***but it doesn't have to be this way***.

As a family physician myself, I am well aware of the time pressures we face and the difficulties we have in meeting the demands of our practices. Personally, I knew I needed to make a change if I wanted to avoid burnout. **Implementing Advanced Access has been the one thing that has most significantly improved my practice and the quality of my life.**

Advanced Access is a philosophy which focuses on meeting the demands of one's practice population in a patient-centred and timely fashion with the goal of patients being able to get an appointment when they need it – be it today, tomorrow or 3 months from now. This may sound impossible, but it is not and, in fact, **most practices are closer to achieving this than they realize**. If it currently takes 2 weeks to get in for a non-urgent appointment – *but it always takes 2 weeks* – then the practice is meeting its demands... just 2 weeks late. The challenge is getting that demand met today.

The benefits of achieving this and having patients being able to see their own physician when they need to are broad and far-reaching:

1. Patients are happier and less anxious.
2. Staff are happier and are no longer forced to triage patients.
3. Physicians are happier as they no longer feel they are on that proverbial treadmill.
4. Patient care improves solely because patients are able to see their own physician when they have the need.

This may sound too good to be true but I assure it is not. Additionally, **no special tools or equipment is required** – simply the openness to look at your schedule differently and the willingness to make the effort to change.

While the concept can appear simple, there are some complexities in the details and with implementation. **Thankfully, Health Quality Ontario is offering free support for practitioners willing to make the effort**. Resources are provided online (<http://hqolc.ca/wave4>) for those who would like to work on implementation independently. For those who wish more support, structured learning is offered via a Learning Community, Quality Improvement Coaches and/or Learning Sessions.

For more information on Advanced Access and the Quality Improvement Program, please go to <http://hqolc.ca/wave4> or contact learningcommunityinfo@hqontario.ca. *Deadline for enrolment is January 13, 2012.* I wish you all the best and hope you can take advantage of this opportunity to **redefine and revitalize your practice**.

Sincerely,

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