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Maximizing Resources for Strategic and Timely Patient Communications of COVID-19 Status

Providing high quality, efficient and patient-centric healthcare services in the setting of a pandemic can be challenging. Shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic began to impact the province of Nova Scotia, leaders at Nova Scotia Health recognized that contacting patients with their test results would be a challenge, and could soon overwhelm their health system. In the early stages, communication of test results was done manually by telephone, ideally within a 48-72-hour timeframe – however, this pace was unlikely to be possible as testing frequency and protocols increased.

Accordingly, leaders within Nova Scotia Health began exploring alternate ways to notify patients of their negative COVID-19 status. This system-wide effort across leading stakeholders aimed to create an improved notification system to communicate COVID-19 testing results in order to optimize resource utilization. Through collaboration with the Nova Scotia Health Information Management and Technology and Public Health teams, in partnership with the provincial Department of Health and Wellness and the Department of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services, they developed an in-house email notification application.

By combining data from the registration system and Lab Information System, the application identifies which patients should receive email notification of their results. The email notification includes a link to a webpage, managed by Nova Scotia Health, where patients can view their results.

Within the first two months of implementation, Nova Scotia Health sent out over 10,000 emails. If each phone call or voicemail to deliver a negative test takes approximately two to three minutes to complete, the new solution has saved staff between 18,000 and 27,000 minutes over two months, or an estimated \$8,100.00 CDN, based on 225 saved resource hours/month. Further, this integrated effort across the Nova Scotia Health system has reduced wait-times for negative COVID-19 results by approximately 80%, as results were made available within 1 day, reducing patient and family fears associated with the unknown as they awaited results.

For their strategic, quick and innovative thinking during a time of need, this integrated clinical care team was recognized by the 2020 UNIVANTS of Healthcare Excellence award program with recognition of Achievement. Congratulations to all team members involved in this effort, with a special congratulations to the leaders of this initiative: Pam Butler, *Executive Director, Health Projects, Department of Health and Wellness, Province of Nova Scotia*, Don Dorion, *Manager, Pathology Informatics, Nova Scotia Health, Information, Management & Technology*, Amy MacDonald, *Manager of Healthy Communities, Public Health, Nova Scotia Health*, Jamey Martell, *Director, Clinical Applications, Nova Scotia Health Information Management & Technology*, Linda Plummer, *Director, Health Information Systems, Nova Scotia Health Information Management & Technology*.

\$8,100 CAD

in mitigated monthly costs

80%

DECREASE

in patient wait times
for COVID-19 status

225

HOURS

of preserved staff
time each month

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. The COVID-19 Pandemic has challenged all health systems to continue to deliver high quality care, while also improving and/or creating new services.
2. Optimizing healthcare delivering and resource utilization can substantially improve patient experience, while also saving money.
3. Collaboration across and between unique stakeholder groups such as information technology and public health can lead to innovative solutions that drive measurably better change within a health system.