

A Picture of Health

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Primary Care Patient Voices

Sharing ideas to improve primary care networks in British Columbia.

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Summer 2020

Throughout B.C., the primary health-care system is changing – and as part of that change, so are the role of patients, families and caregivers. Through a partnership with the [Patient Voices Network](#) (PVN), administered by the [BC Patient Safety & Quality Council](#) (BCPSQC), patients, families and caregivers are increasingly being sought out to be part of the team, not only in their own health decisions, but at all levels of planning, delivery, and implementation of B.C.'s health-care system. Under the province's [Primary Care Strategy](#), there is a concerted effort for greater involvement at provincial, regional, and local planning tables to support primary care networks (PCNs).

Layton Engwer, a passionate long-time advocate for including patients' voices, has helped coordinate this evolution for patient partners. As a PVN member, Layton has participated in several committees including a local planning committee in his home community of Westshore on Vancouver Island. In his role as a member of the Primary and

Community Care Advisory Forum, Layton saw a need to connect with other patient partners doing similar work across B.C.

"I know there are about 4.9 million patients in B.C." said Layton, "I needed a way to connect with other patient partners working with PCNs to bounce ideas off and get more input." Out of that need, he devised a plan, with the full sponsorship of the B.C. Ministry of Health, to reach out and find other highly motivated patient partners already involved in primary care to form a group called Primary Care Patient Voices (PCPV). "I wanted to find a way for many voices to be heard and have influence on how PCNs are forming and working," explained Layton.

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In late 2019, the Council, through PVN, put out a call to patient partners with the criteria that they must currently be involved in primary care work in B.C. to be involved. Over 15 participants have joined the group with membership continuing to expand. Participants come from all regions of the province, each bringing a different perspective and value to the group.

Kelly McQuillen, executive director of Primary Care Planning, implementation and oversight for the ministry adds that, "what we see from the experience



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of our patient partners is that they bring a broad depth of input.” True health-system transformation requires going beyond public understanding to authentic engagement. “Patient voices, and the communities they represent, need to be heard and present to influence change,” said Kelly. “For PCPV, it was important to establish structures and processes to support continuous engagement in PCNs.” The result is a self-governing committee that serves two main goals:

- Educate, discuss issues and review initiatives related to PCNs with patient partners.
- Advance patient involvement and engagement in the progression of person-and-family-centred care within primary care.

The PCPV vision: *Patients, families and caregivers are key influencers of how primary care will be provided, implemented and improved for their benefit, and are responsible for holding the health-care system accountable, as consumers of these services.*

“We hope to be able to turn this into an on-going, long-term group focused on primary care evolution,” said Layton. As PCPV continues to form, some ideas of where they can be involved in providing input include:

- Improving primary, team-based and person-and-family-centred care.
- Advising primary care partners at a local, regional and provincial levels.
- Providing a forum for members to learn and share experiences.
- Sharing feedback on, and ideas for, initiatives and programs that enhance and embrace the model of person-and-family-centred care.
- Being a collaborative, positive and rational force for the enhancement of high-quality team-based, person-and-family-centred care.

- Advancing patient involvement/engagement in the progression of person-and-family-centred care principles and practices.

PCPV continues to be routinely engaged on initiatives and programs that enhance aspects of primary care for patients. Most recently, PCPV was consulted by the [General Practice Services Committee \(GPSC\) Information Sharing Task Group](#) to provide input on a poster targeting patients. The task group engaged PCPV to provide feedback on how and what to best communicate with patients. The result is a clear, concise and direct [poster](#) that communities will see in their care provider’s clinic.

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“The poster was very much patient influenced by the patient partners,” said Shana Ooms, the ministry’s executive director of Primary Care Strategy, policy and quality. “Where those of us in the room may have debated policy or wording, PCPV made sure patients were top of mind. And as a result, significant improvements were made to simplify something that was otherwise complex. Patient voices at the table



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brings us back to reality in terms of what we are trying to achieve.”

Supporting person- and family-centredness is an ongoing effort and a sustained priority the Ministry of Health. Shana explains that having patients in the room changes the conversation, adding “we tend to spend less time on value for providers and more time on value for patients. The solutions end up more patient-focused when you have patients in the room. Fundamentally, this changes how the conversation progresses.” Shana acknowledges both are important, adding we in B.C. agree with the quadruple aim philosophy that both provider and patient experience are important, however we often neglect or do not make room for the latter.”

Patient engagement is a two-way street. Supporting meaningful involvement of patient partners is fostered through the continued partnerships between organizations such as BCPSQC, PVN and the ministry. Through its [Patients as Partners](#) initiative, the ministry also works to build engagement capacity by providing training to health sector staff, leading engagement sessions to support ministry priorities and providing free engagement tools and resources.

As the work in primary care evolves, Layton sees many possibilities for how PCPV can be supported. “We need ways to communicate, mentor and facilitate so that we can be successful, long-term,” said Layton. The ministry continues to work with PCPV to bring in facilitators and presenters to discuss a range of issues and topics – from service delivery models to compensation structures.

What’s clear is that this type of group shows promise in how to create connections, increase a more robust understanding of health-care topics and provide a faster path to feedback from patient and family partners in British Columbia. Shana shares, “In this work we see glimmers of what is possible to shift to a person-centred system of care especially when we collectively experience something like COVID-19.

That’s my hope for the future – that we start tipping toward person-and-family-centred transformation.” As advocates for patients and B.C. families, PCPV are key influencers on how primary care will be provided, implemented and improved for the better. We look forward to sharing more as the group evolves.

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