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Accreditation Canada is a not-for-profit independent organization that provides health services organizations with a rigorous and comprehensive accreditation process. We foster ongoing quality improvement based on evidence-based standards and external peer review. Accredited by the International Society for Quality in Health Care, Accreditation Canada has helped organizations strive for excellence for more than 50 years.

Les éditions du Point is a specialized publisher. One of its journals, *Le Point en administration de la santé et des services sociaux*, is intended for health professionals and administrators and has been published for six years. Les éditions du Point's publications target administrators, managers, and professionals in health care. The publications are intended as tools for information, support, professional development, and continuing education, as well as for reflection, analysis, and expression. While remaining very close to the concerns of the targeted readership, the publications are also guided by national and international thinking.



WENDY NICKLIN
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Primary Care - Leading through Innovation



The vast majority of Canadians use the primary care sector for the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of their ills. Yet we often overlook this sector's strategic capacity to influence the whole health care system. As health care's main point of entry, primary care has a cascading effect on all other health care sectors and client outcomes; its reform is of great importance to the entire system.

The vital importance of quality improvement initiatives in primary care, particularly those focused on patient safety, is reflected within much of the work undertaken by Accreditation Canada over the past few years. For example, the recently released Primary Care Standards focus on improving patients' access to entry points, coordinating care across their life cycle, maintaining efficient clinical information systems, and achieving positive outcomes. These new standards effectively complement other Accreditation Canada standards related to primary health care, such as Community Health Services, Public Health Services, and Emergency Medical Services.

In this issue, the authors tackle varied aspects of the Canadian primary care system. June Bergman discusses the rise of Canadian primary care reform and she presents several innovative programs and projects directed at enhancing primary care in Canada. She also considers how accreditation can support quality improvement activities.

Yves Desjardins describes the rise of new primary care models in Quebec, highlighting the success of integrated network clinics.

John Abbott emphasizes the need for continuing conversations regarding patient and provider communications, appropriate prescribing, suitable diagnostic imaging, and physicians' time pressures.

Lacey Phillips considers the state of Canada's primary health care system, and the development and release of Accreditation Canada's Primary Care Standards.

Wendy Muckle and Jeffrey Turnbull explore the difficulties in creating accessible and effective primary care services for

Canada's vulnerable populations. They explore the necessity of integrating care and building a "therapeutic alliance" with vulnerable patients.

Louise Bradley discusses the obstacles facing primary care providers, specific to mental health. She also looks at solutions being tested here in Canada, and around the world.

Lisa Rosenkrantz, Mark Fraser, and Barry Bruce provide a bird's eye view of their practice in Carp, Ontario, which underwent significant operational changes when they instituted a physician and staff-wide quality improvement initiative. They discuss their approach and the outcomes of this initiative.

Juanita Barrett discusses the momentum gained across Canada from the Primary Health Care Transition Fund 2002-06, and current challenges to system-wide improvements. When reading Juanita's article, you should note that "primary health care" refers to a broad, population-based, proactive health services strategy that focuses on maintaining, managing, and improving the overall health of the general public. "Primary care" refers to services provided as a point of entry into the health system—a patient's first point of contact, which may take place in clinics, hospitals, family practices, or a community health centre.

Rob Wedel and his colleagues tell us how Albertans tackled the growing problem of primary care access with their innovative AIM project (Access~Improvement~Measures).

The spectrum of care in Canada is evolving both in its complexity and the challenges it poses. As the entry point into this broad system, primary care is increasingly propelled by innovation, rather than tradition. As you read this issue, I encourage you to think about your own work environment, and the ways in which you are contributing to primary care reform.

Wendy Nicklin