# Alberta Doctors' Digest

## Connect Care for the rest of us

I started using an electronic medical record (EMR) about 34 years ago with the hope that this tool would improve patient care and my efficiency as a primary care provider. Our goal to eventually become paperless required significant connectivity with many outside sources including labs, radiologists, specialists, other family doctors, hospitals, etc.

Unfortunately, because of many other information silos (both paper and digital) in our current system (at least 1,300 clinical information systems in Alberta Health Services [AHS] alone), the paper stream into our EMR did not improve significantly but needed to be managed locally through many input methods. Despite some improvements in connectivity, the fragmentation of medical information continues to result in delays in receiving information and many potential errors, with the potential of increasing patient risk and decreasing efficiency.

Connect Care is a collaborative effort between Alberta Health (AH) and AHS to develop a shared provincial clinical information system designed to help improve patient outcomes and support consistent use of health information across Alberta. It will replace clinical information systems (three) and most health information systems (approximately 1,300) currently in place across all AHS facilities. According to the public website for Connect Care, "Connect Care will help physicians and other clinicians deliver faster, more accurate and more accessible patient care. Connect Care will also provide timely access to decision-making tools. This will allow best practices to be aligned across the organization. Over time, it will make health care faster, easier and safer." This would seem to indicate that my hope and goal as a community health care provider for the last 30+ years is finally coming to fruition. However Epic Systems Corporation, the vendor providing the tool, does not at present produce an EMR for community physicians. Where does that leave the community health care providers?

Connect Care is a collaborative effort between Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services to develop a shared provincial clinical information system.

The Connect Care leadership team understands that a significant portion of health care provided to Albertans occurs in the community and will provide tools to interested patients and health care providers served by AHS. These tools will allow access to up-to-date, accurate information in an easily accessible form.

According to the Connect Care for Primary Care website, community providers will have access to the 'Connect Care Provider Portal,' an online portal that connects them to health information stored in the Connect Care Clinical Information System. As patients move throughout the health care system, providers can receive notifications and view updates about:

- lab, imaging, test and procedure results

- admissions, transitions and discharges
- referrals and consultations
- clinical images and scanned files
- notes, letters and documents
- orders placed by other providers

Providers will also be able to request consults, schedule appointments, place orders, and exchange secure messages with colleagues, patients and their circle of care.

This portal, using Epic's "EpicCare Link" software will be customized to the needs of providers who share patient care with AHS including the functionality to inform providers via push notification (e.g., email, text) when their patients interact with AHS systems. Community providers *will not* need to change their EMRs to participate in Connect Care, and significant effort is being expended to improve patient care and clinical workflow through collaboration with current EMR vendors and through significant end-user input.

As a primary care physician who has waited almost an entire career for these changes to occur, I am excited for the future. A project of this scope will require significant time to roll out to the entire province, but I am reassured that this time is being spent wisely with the needs and input of all providers being considered in detail.

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**Resources for more detailed information**

Public Website for Connect Care (http://connect-care.ca)

Connect Care for Primary Care (http://handbook.ahs-cis.ca/?=12779)

Connect Care Gateways for Providers and Patients (http://handbook.ahs-cis.ca/?=12944)

Dr. Rob Hayward blog on Provider Portal (http://www.bytesblog.ca/2018/02/14.html)

Connect Care Provider Portal (http://handbook.ahs-cis.ca/?=12946)

Connect Care Resources for clinicians (http://ahs-cis.ca/mdresources)

Videos showing Connect Care kickoff and Overview of Epic software (Connect Care Epic Presentation Part 1) and (Connect Care Epic Presentation Part 2)

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Banner photo credit: Alberta Health Services Connect Care website, http://connect-care.ca