

## Physician Office Integration Program improves quality and timeliness of patient care in the North West LHIN

**May 7, 2012** – Of all the many ways in which health care has changed and evolved in the past 25 years, the manner in which patient information is managed and transmitted may well be the most significant. Electronic health information is in the process of replacing paper records in hospitals, clinics and doctors' offices, and this is good news for patients and providers alike. The North West LHIN's Physician Office Integration (POI) program is a perfect example of what electronic information technology can do.

POI allows patients' health records, including diagnostic test reports, to be sent from a hospital's information system to the Electronic Medical Record (EMR) in their physicians' offices. EMRs are the modern version of a doctor's paper files. They electronically capture and store important patient information – everything from medical history to medications to x-ray and lab results. What POI does is transfer patient information directly from the hospital to the doctor's office, meaning that family doctors have that information on file almost before their patients have even left the hospital.

POI was launched in 2007, and has grown steadily since. Currently, 12 hospitals participate in the program, flowing information to 25 clinics in the LHIN. POI started with 22 providers. That number has now grown to 168 doctors and nurse practitioners, and the program benefits more than 150,000 patients.

The potential for better, more efficient health care through this type of initiative would be obvious anywhere, but particularly so in a region as vast as Northwestern Ontario. If a patient receives a test in Thunder Bay, it could actually be days before the results of that test make their way to his or her doctor's office in Red Lake under a paper-based system. Under POI, primary care clinicians have what is effectively real-time access to important patient information, with no need for filing and sorting. This saves their offices administrative time, and allows them to make much more timely decisions about their patients' care.

The POI initiative has been a resounding success. 21,000 reports per month are sent via POI in the North West LHIN, and it is estimated that this saves more than 1,100 hours of clinical administration time. Electronic health records provide the kind of immediate access to information that doctors could only dream about 5 years ago, and today clinicians are reporting improvements in patient safety, as well as continuity and quality of care. It is another critical step in integrating the Northwest region's health care system. There are plans being drawn up to expand the program further, in order to include even more clinics and doctors' offices, provide more electronic information services to them and benefit even more patients.