A key component in evaluating the success and benefits of patient medical homes involves collecting stories of health care change from doctors, patients, and allied care providers. These stories take readers on a journey toward understanding how patient medical homes are improving care around the province.

Change Snapshot: How working with the Doctors Technology Office (DTO) helped facilitate the work to integrate 5 regional EMRs.

Listen to an audio version of this story here.

Provincial-Level Support for Locally-Led Data Integration Project

I'm a locum working in this rural community, and my role in the PMH initiative was to work on integrating the EMRs in our region for the purpose of enhancing patient care. We started by working with physicians to get their perspectives and input, and we also asked the vendor to propose an efficient way of data sharing. We all use the same EMR in our region, which is unique. Our hopes were to either share a data repository, where we could view live, read-only patient information, or fully merge all 5 of our EMRs.

To engage physicians, we invited all physicians in the community, and met three times for a big dinner at the golf course about a year ago. We have also had 2 dinner meetings with clinic managers to obtain input. They are very important for billing and scheduling and we hoped to have them involved in an ongoing way.

So far, we have found that a shared data repository would not be practical for us on the Sunshine coast. Instead, we continue to explore the option of a full EMR integration. We found that physicians were reluctant to proceed with a full integration because of a bad experience with an EMR merger some years ago. The clinics ended up having to put in a lot of extra clerical and physician time to clean up patient charts. The vendor claims that it has improved the process since then, but physicians in our community remain understandably skeptical. We remain concerned about the time it could take to fix patient charts, and we worry about lost data.

We started working with the Doctors Technology Office (DTO) to get help with our negotiation. They have been an important advocate for us. They got the vendor to assign a project manager to us to help prioritize our project. They have also helped negotiate the creation of a test environment for us that we have named the "sandbox." The test environment would allow us to see what a full merge would look like before we agree to it. The DTO has also provided us with an Innovation Grant to help fund this ground-breaking project.

As of today, there remains many uncertainties about the project. However, with the help of the DTO, and the ongoing willingness of the vendor to improve its process of EMR integration, we are hopeful that we can successfully integrate all 5 EMRs in our region.