

Stewardship Programs in the Saskatchewan Health Authority

There are currently several departments and programs within the SHA that focus on different aspects of healthcare stewardship. These include the Stewardship and Clinical Appropriateness Department (Antimicrobial Stewardship Program, Opioid Stewardship Program) and Patient Blood Management Department (Immunoglobulin Stewardship Program).

Regardless of their specific focus, the purpose of a stewardship program, in general, is to ensure the best patient outcomes by promoting appropriate use of healthcare resources. As such, stewardship programs are evidence-based in nature and rely heavily on implementation science and behaviour change research to achieve their goals. Due to their inherent quality improvement aspects, stewardship programs are also a key part of developing a learning health system as they require data to continuously inform and improve upon processes and care.

The successful outcomes of initiatives supported by stewardship programs are often realized at an arm's length from the stewardship program proper. Projects that directly affect patient care are supported by the implementation science, data science, and behaviour change expertise of stewardship programs. Resourcing the downstream clinical work without also resourcing the upstream stewardship team creates barriers to continued quality improvement efforts.

To be successful, stewardship programs require system-wide collaboration and must be supported by a multidisciplinary team. Proper resourcing includes information and data support and infrastructure, program planning and development support, clinician engagement, patient engagement, communications and awareness support, and support from administration across all levels of the healthcare system.

Healthcare stewardship programs are often associated with cost saving initiatives. While this is often a side effect of the work of these programs, cost reductions are not the primary goal. Instead, high functioning stewardship programs aim to improve patient outcomes and reduce unnecessary waste. Building capacity for stewardship within the healthcare system and creating a culture of stewardship among patients and providers helps to ensure safe and appropriate care in a more sustainable system.

Lastly, improvements due to stewardship efforts do not occur overnight. Sustained behaviour change in a system takes time and resources if high quality outcomes are desired. Thus, it is important that leadership understands the resource needs of stewardship programs and appropriate support is provided to meet program goals. It is equally important for the multidisciplinary stewardship team (e.g., clinical, administrative, and other support staff) to be well trained in areas such as: quality improvement, data collection, analysis and presentation, implementation science, behaviour change, etc., needed to support the work.