

Best Practice Guidelines for Specialists Participating in the Ontario eConsult Service

These guidelines are being provided to you in connection with your use of the Provincial eConsult Program's eConsult Service (the "eConsult Service"). These guidelines are supplementary to the OTNhub Terms of Service and User Agreement (the "OTNhub Agreements").

A. Background

The eConsult Service provides healthcare providers ("HCP(s)") with an asynchronous electronic communication tool that allows them to communicate directly with specialists via a web-based portal so they can obtain advice about their patient's care. The eConsult Service has been developed to improve equitable and timely access to specialist advice for HCPs and their patients.

All participants must be committed to improving communication between primary care and specialists and providing excellent patient care.

B. Registering for the Service

All participating specialist providers must complete the onboarding process. This includes registration, training, reimbursement process and who to contact in case of concerns/suggestions. If a specialist also wants to be able to submit an eConsult to another specialist, they are encouraged to complete the online training available for initiating an eConsult.

Only members in good standing of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario or of another professional college deemed appropriate (e.g. pharmacists) can participate. Specialists will provide consultations only within their scope of practice. Appropriate medical (or other health professional, as applicable) protective insurance must be maintained. Providers must withdraw from the service if they are no longer members of their professional college in good standing or covered with medical protective insurance.

C. Service Level Expectations of Specialists responding to eConsults

1. Response to requests

Specialists responding to eConsults should provide an opinion based on the information included in the eConsult. In general, specialists should expect referring HCPs to provide necessary information about the patient's problem; the clinical question to be answered; patient details; and relevant investigations, treatments, and medication. As such, specialists should have sufficient details about the patient's condition to be able to provide answers to specific questions and give appropriate advice. However not all patient questions can be answered through eConsult. The specialist may request the HCP provide more information prior to providing an opinion or may decline to make a recommendation. If further information is required, or an opinion cannot be provided, the specialist should communicate same to the referring HCP.

2. Timeliness of Response

It is expected that the specialist will reply as soon as is possible, but no later than seven days from the date of receipt of the eConsult from the referring HCP.

3. Privacy

The eConsult Service stores the clinical information/personal health information related to an eConsult submitted by a provider securely in a repository ("PHI"). Through a series of workflows, information is transferred from this database into forms which only the identified parties involved in the eConsult interaction can access.

Access to the eConsult platform requires individualized user accounts and is password protected. Requesting (referring) HCPs (or delegates acting on their behalf) will only have access to information about consultations the referring HCP has initiated, while responding specialists will only have access to consultations assigned to them.

HCPs that use delegates to input information on their behalf should notify the eConsult Service immediately once a delegate has changed roles or left the practice and should no longer have access on behalf of the assigning HCP.

All privacy and security policies that apply to patient charts in the HCP office should apply to the consultation reply.

4. Documentation

The HCPs initiating an eConsult maintain their role as health information custodians of PHI that they create or collect through an eConsult, and should follow all existing rules, regulations and laws. As mentioned above, the referring HCP should provide sufficient information about the patient so that a specialist may provide needed healthcare advice and recommendations for treatment.

The consultation response will be included in the record of the eConsult which can be accessed by the referring HCP following the closure of the case. The record should be downloaded by the referring HCP or their delegate and stored in paper or electronic formats in the HCP's record for the patient.

5. Impact on other clinical work

Participation in the eConsult Service may result in restrictions on other clinical activities. The specialist should assess the impact on other clinical work and patients and consider opportunities to reduce this impact.

6. Providing availability:

All specialists participating in the eConsult Service should provide availability and "out of office" notification through the established processes of the Service.

7. Engagement

Specialists participating in the eConsult Service should be active participants in continuous improvement of the Service. This may include reviewing proposed changes to the Service, physician utilization of the Service evaluation data provided to them and providing input on workflow/system improvements. This may involve working with regional and provincial stakeholders.

D. Role of Delegates

In some circumstances, an HCP will delegate the responsibilities for entering/retrieving eConsult data to an appropriate staff member (i.e. referral clerk) within their practice or use eConsult to support their residents or trainees who submit an eConsult under their supervision. The HCP is responsible for ensuring that the delegate has the necessary training and credentials for this role and is responsible for advising the eConsult Service when a trainee or staff member no longer has a role as their delegate for the purposes of the eConsult Service.

E. Billing and Payment information

The billing times are processed quarterly based on the agreed pro-rated hourly rate. Specialist providers who receive a salary from a publicly funded agency should not be billing for eConsults unless outside of the scope of employment and done outside of publicly funded time. Specialists are expected to bill only for time required to answer the clinical question. This may require accessing resources to provide an informed response. However, detailed research and extensive response is outside the scope of the eConsult Service. Specialists are expected to keep billing information up-to-date to facilitate timely payment.

F. Contacts

Questions about eConsult can be directed to the eConsult Centre of Excellence at eConsultCOE@toh.ca. Technical questions about eConsult can be directed to OTN's Customer Care team at 1-855-654-0888 or by email at customercare@otn.ca.