

## Western Champlain Health Link Communiqué

### Two stories of Health Link practitioners

Kortney Larock was a Community Health Worker, taking the Health Links approach with complex patients, at the North Lanark Community Health Centre until she left for another job at the end of September 2019. Before she left, she talked about the impact of her work on herself and on the patients with whom she worked.

When asked what most surprised her about taking the Health Links approach, she responded that “it didn’t occur to me how many people just fall through the cracks. While they receive some medical care for chronic conditions, they have no one to call to help them navigate the system. It surprised me how little people know how to navigate the health care and social system. These are people living with many medical conditions, no prescription coverage. They are not aware of resources and don’t have right information. Who do you turn to? Who do you call?”

“Communication is huge – sometimes the patient isn’t asked the right questions”

Her “a-ha moment” came as she worked with a patient with a low level of health literacy and many complex conditions, who had been driving two hours one way, twelve hours a week to receive dialysis. This patient had spent \$30,000 paying for medical transportation and had had to deplete all their savings in order to receive dialysis at a regional centre. She had initially been attending dialysis fifteen minutes from home, but something had been changed in her treatment plan so that she was told to go to the larger centre. Not enough had been done to keep her in the local dialysis clinic, after one local treatment option had not been successful. Despite their best efforts of the specialist, family physician, and clinics, no one was aware of the extent of the hardship the patient was experiencing. When Kortney got involved, the patient set their goal to receive treatment closer to home. By communicating this goal and presenting the full picture of the patient’s current situation, Kortney was able to get the physicians and clinic staff onboard. The patient was able to get back some semblance of a life, despite her many complex conditions. For Kortney “communication is huge – sometimes the patient isn’t asked the right questions”. The system provides such a limited amount of time at appointments and deals just with direct care, not the big picture.



Deanna Kerr has been a Health Link Care Coordinator for the Champlain LHIN Home & Community Care for eighteen months. She spoke about how the Health Links approach has enabled her to feel refreshed and reinvigorated in her work as a community nurse. She felt value as a person working in health care. Learning the details of patients’ lives as well as the details of local resources let her grow as a professional.

Deanna stated that it was invaluable having access to in-depth medical information about patients she was working with. She worked closely with family physicians and specialists, even attending the occasional clinical appointments to ensure there was good communication between clinicians and patients and family. Combining clinical knowledge, the patient’s goals, and the ability to tackle a wide range of issues, the Health Links approach “open[ed] my eyes to the whole picture”. In turn, patients would establish a rapport with her and other members of their care team. Repeatedly, patients would say, “I feel heard”.

Deanna found that it was small subtleties in the way she could organize patient care that had significant impact in patients’ lives. It was in matching the details of the patient’s goals and the details of local resources that the person could move forward with their goals. Whether it was working with a community organization to provide a bar fridge for a diabetic living in a rooming house to store their insulin, or discussing the possible sale of prize horses with a retired farmer who knew he would have to move to long term care, Deanna appreciated the wide-ranging role of care coordination. Deanna was quick to point out that lower case load numbers was a huge enabler for being able to offer this more intensive case management role. “Health Links carries on”, said Deanna” ... Health Links helps patients manage going forward”.

**Western Champlain Update**

Since April 1, 2019, 279 complex patients have had Coordinated Care Plans (CCPs) created in Western Champlain. Cumulatively, 1584 complex patients in Western Champlain have had CCPs created since March 2015. Currently, twenty-one health and social service organizations are embedding the Health Link approach in their front line work with complex patients.



**Season’s Greetings from the Western Champlain Health Link Team**

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