

# FIRST-IN-CANADA VIRTUAL HOSPITALIST PROGRAM EXTENDED

Maple “tele-rounding” technology keeping hospital doors open despite physician shortages

Following a successful six-month pilot program, Health PEI has signed a one-year contract with Canadian telemedicine company, Maple, to continue providing virtual hospitalist services to Western Hospital. Developed through a collaborative partnership with both Health PEI and the Medical Society of PEI, the program addresses the physician recruitment and retention challenges faced not only in Alberton, PEI, but across the country. This is made possible by a ground-breaking platform that connects the hospital with a network of physicians from across Canada to treat patients each day.

Called “tele-rounding,” the program uses a unique video conferencing system to allow doctors to remotely view and discuss treatment options with patients and hospital staff on the ground. The platform is complemented by innovative technologies like digital stethoscopes and a system that allows doctors to remotely and securely access patient files, make referrals, and order additional testing as needed.

“Tele-rounding has provided Western Hospital stability in its services while we actively recruit new physicians to the region,” says Paul Young, Health PEI’s Administrator for Western Hospitals.

Prior to the decision to extend the program, the service underwent an evaluation by Health PEI to examine several factors including staff and patient satisfaction, adverse events, readmission, mortality and morbidity. The evidence collected since the program began last August is indicative of success across multiple metrics.

While Western Hospital is the first to pilot this new technology, it could be used to address physician shortages across the country — an issue highlighted by CIHI, which showed rural communities are served by only 8% of physicians despite making up 17% of the population at the time of the last census.

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—Paul Young, Administrator Community Hospitals West

“Redistributing physician capacity could have a profound effect on rural health care, but we see much wider applications for the technology,” says Dr. Brett Belchetz, a practicing emergency room physician and the CEO and Co-Founder of Maple. “Through the platform, we’ve been able to reduce the time it takes for everyday processes like discharge planning. This helps ensure that hospitals are working efficiently and their resources are allocated to those who truly need them.”

With other applications being actively explored, such as emergency room triage and making on-call shifts more cost and time-effective, this platform is looking to have benefits for large hospitals as well as small. As the provinces look to make health care delivery more efficient, Maple’s platform will continue to evolve to ensure the most effective use of strained resources like doctors, budgets and beds.

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