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# Family Health Teams

*Advancing Primary Health Care*

## Guide to Communications

April 16, 2006



## Purpose

This guide is one of a series of guides developed to provide information and assistance to Family Health Teams. General information on Family Health Teams can be found on the ministry's website at: <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/familyhealthteams>.

This guide provides information about mandatory requirements, protocols and resources available to Family Health Teams to assist with their communications needs.

This guide is **not** intended to advise physicians or other health care providers on communicating with patients in the clinical setting and the information in this document is intended only as a guide.

Each team will develop at its own pace and teams should take from this guide what is useful for developing their own communications.

## Why Communicate?

Since Family Health Teams are a new model for providing primary health care in Ontario, patients, the public and the media are likely to have questions about Family Health Teams. The website [www.health.gov.on.ca/familyhealthteams](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/familyhealthteams) provides information on Family Health Teams – what they do, how they are different from the previous service model and how they will benefit patients. This information may be used when developing communications.

Each Family Health Team is unique and each will become operational at different times. It is anticipated that Family Health Teams will have many opportunities to communicate with the public as they become operational: when new members are added to the team; when new services are being offered to patients; when the Family Health Team is expanded or moves to a new location or when the Family Health Team is accepting new patients, etc. It is also anticipated that Family Health Teams will communicate with other health care providers and organizations in their communities, particularly from a program planning/service integration perspective. For more details on this aspect of Family Health Team development, please see the Guide to Community Funding Partnerships and Program/Service Integration.

## Communications Requirements

There are three communication requirements for Family Health Teams.

- All Family Health Teams are required to use the term “Family Health Team” in their name.
- The Family Health Team name should be consistent in all media, such as stationery, pamphlets, signage and other printed materials, as well as audio-visual materials, telephone, e-mail and website messaging.
- If Family Health Teams choose to make media announcements for items made possible by ministry funding (i.e., hiring interdisciplinary team members, opening new facilities, etc.), **Family Health Teams must inform the ministry of the potential announcement through their Family Health Team Coordinator three weeks in advance**. The minister (or his/her delegate) may decide to make the announcement or participate in the event.

## Support from the Ministry

The ministry has developed a number of resources to assist Family Health Teams with communications. The ministry will communicate with Family Health Teams on a regular basis through the Family Health Team Coordinators, Family Health Team bulletins, Family Health Team E-news and print materials. A video about Family Health Teams that can be used as a communication and education resource will also be available to the public and will be distributed to Family Health Teams.

Family Health Team Coordinators will have access to these communication resources developed by the ministry and may be able to advise around the preparation of communications.

## Communication Resources

Family Health Teams will have many opportunities to communicate with patients, the public and the media. Communications can include everything from face-to-face encounters, stationery, pamphlets, signage, materials for enrolment, Telephone Health Advisory Service (THAS), notices about services, websites, etc. Below are some resources to assist Family Health Teams:

### Visual Identity Guidelines

The ministry has developed and produced Family Health Team visual identity guidelines for use of the official Family Health Team logo. The font style is ITC Century; the colour is Haliburton Green (PMS 7475); and the placement of the name with the Family Health Team is illustrated in the Visual Identity Guidelines.

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## Family Health Team

The Visual Identity Guidelines and templates are available on a CD from your Family Health Team Coordinator or online at [www.health.gov.on.ca/familyhealthteams](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/familyhealthteams).

### Description of Family Health Teams

Family Health Teams are made up of physicians and other health care providers that can include nurses, nurse practitioners, pharmacists, dietitians, physician specialists, social workers, health educators, mental health workers and others, depending on the health needs of the community they serve.

A Family Health Team will:

- Provide a comprehensive range of health care services delivered by a team to meet the community's health care needs.
- Expand access to health care by providing services on weekdays, with most offering extended hours weeknights and weekends, as well as providing access to registered nurses after-hours through THAS.
- Provide health information so that patients can make informed decisions on how to manage their health care needs.
- Support health promotion and disease prevention activities as well as the management of chronic diseases, such as diabetes and asthma.
- Improve the coordination of health care by better linking our patients to other parts of the health care system, such as hospitals, long-term care facilities, public health, mental health and community programs and services.
- Use information technology more effectively, resulting in health care providers across the system sharing appropriate, timely and secure access to patient test results and medical histories.

### **Communication with Patients**

Family Health Teams will need to communicate to their patients about the new and expanded services that are available, about enrolment and how to access THAS. Posting notices in clinic offices and waiting rooms, as well as placing messages on telephone answering systems are some ways by which this communication can be facilitated. As the team becomes more involved in health promotion and chronic disease management, there will likely be information and materials to provide to patients. There are many printed materials available from not-for-profit health organizations. Please see the Guide to Health Promotion and Disease Prevention and Guide to Chronic Disease Management and Prevention for information on these resources.

Health information for patients is also available at [www.healthyontario.com](http://www.healthyontario.com).

### **Website page for each Family Health Team**

The ministry plans to have an electronic list of each Family Health Team available with a link to a web page that provides the name, address, and contact information of each Family Health Team. Family Health Teams will be able to create their own content on the web page. Those teams that already have a website or are developing a website can request a link on the ministry's website through their Family Health Team Coordinator. The electronic list will be available on the Family Health Team website at [www.health.gov.on.ca/familyhealthteams](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/familyhealthteams).

### **Communication with the Public and Media**

As each Family Health Team becomes operational, the community that it serves will be interested in learning about the Team's plans for new programs and interdisciplinary team members.

Local media will also be interested in the progress of Family Health Teams. The following checklist may help with the planning of media communications:

- What are we announcing?
- When should we make the announcement and where should it take place? (i.e., should it coincide with a new program launch, new Family Health Team opening or expansion)?
- What are the key facts (i.e., how many more patients will the Family Health Team be able to see, what additional services are now available to patients, what impact will this have on your patients)?
- Who will be the spokesperson for the Family Health Team?
- Who will the media interview – team members, patients?

Before any contact with media is made, it is important for Family Health Teams to inform Family Health Team Coordinators in advance of their plans.

### **Internal Communication within the Team**

It is strongly recommended that Family Health Teams establish structures for communication amongst providers, interdisciplinary team members and administrative staff to facilitate dialogue and plan programs for the future. The Guide to Collaborative Team Practice contains information on communicating to promote effective team practice. In addition to regular discussions about patients and clinical issues, Family Health Teams will also need to communicate about human resource matters, continuing education, community outreach and events, as well as evidence-based guidelines for patient care.

## Where to Get More Information

All approved Family Health Teams will be assigned a ministry Family Health Team Coordinator. This ministry contact person will be your guide to assist you to work through the details for planned external communications from your Family Health Team.

If you have not yet been assigned a coordinator, please contact the ministry at:

E-mail: FHTinquiry@moh.gov.on.ca  
Address: Primary Health Care Team  
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care  
1075 Bay Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, ON M5S 2B1  
Telephone: 416-212-6155  
Toll-Free Phone: 1-866-766-0266

For more information on Family Health Teams in general, please refer to the Family Health Team Fact Sheets on the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care website at: <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/familyhealthteams>.



