
Family Health Teams

Advancing Primary Health Care

Guide to Telephone Health Advisory Service (THAS)

July 4, 2005

Purpose

This guide provides information to Family Health Teams (FHTs) about the Telephone Health Advisory Service (THAS).

This is one of a series of guides developed to assist those in the process of forming Family Health Teams.

For information on interdisciplinary practitioner funding refer to the Guide to Interdisciplinary Provider Compensation, for information on community partners refer to the Guide to Local Community Integration, and for information on interdisciplinary team roles and responsibilities refer to the Guide to Interdisciplinary Team Roles and Responsibilities.

General information on Family Health Teams can be found on the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care website at http://www.health.gov.on.ca/transformation/fht/fht_mn.html or in the Family Health Team Fact Sheets.

Background

THAS is a key component of the ministry's commitment to supporting physicians in providing comprehensive, accessible, and coordinated primary health care services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

It is an after-hours telephone health advice and triage service for enrolled patients of aligned primary health care models in Ontario and is designed to enhance the patient/health care provider relationship by providing continuous patient care.

Patients who call THAS have access to Ontario Registered Nurses who will provide them with symptom based health advice and information. In addition, for enrolled/registered patients, THAS nurses will have access to FHTs' on-call physicians and when appropriate will call the physician for secondary triage regarding the callers' concerns.

Getting Started With THAS

As part of FHT requirements, THAS will be available to the patients on physicians' rosters.

The ministry will contact each FHT physician prior to the launch of THAS to provide them with the THAS start date. The ministry will also provide a start-up package, which includes a range of communication materials, a quick reference guide and a THAS fact sheet comprised of frequently asked questions.

The THAS service provider will then contact each FHT's lead physician to obtain an on-call schedule for the FHT as well as the FHT's extended hour clinics so that callers may be directed there if necessary.

How Patients Access THAS

Communication materials are available to help physicians ensure their patients are aware of and understand THAS and its benefits. These materials include information posters, brochures and wallet cards to inform patients of the toll-free number and its use.

It is also recommended that FHTs provide patients with the THAS number on their after hours telephone message.

Patient Call Process

Patients who call THAS are connected to a nurse or a patient assistant representative.

Once patients are transferred to a nurse, their demographic information and enrolment status is verified.

Based on the THAS nurse's assessment and the clinical guidelines, the nurse will provide self-care advice, direct the patient to their physician's office (within 24-72 hours), contact the on-call physician or direct the caller to the nearest emergency department.

Should secondary triage be necessary, the THAS nurse will contact the on-call physician (see below for on-call physician process).

With caller's consent the THAS nurse will also send a fax detailing the caller's encounter with the service to caller's primary care physician.

THAS Obligations

THAS is available 5 p.m. to 9 a.m. Monday through Thursday; 5 p.m. Friday through 9 a.m. Monday; and during recognized holidays. A physician from the FHT must be on-call during these hours.

Each FHT must provide the THAS provider with an on-call schedule and information regarding extended hour clinics. It is the responsibility of each FHT to ensure the information is up-to-date.

On-Call Physician Process

The on-call physician is contacted when the THAS nurse's assessment and clinical guidelines indicate that the enrolled patient may need to be seen by or speak to a physician within a certain timeframe and the FHT's after-hours/extended-hours clinics are not available. With the consent of the caller, the THAS nurse will contact the on-call physician and provide a brief summary of the patient's symptoms.

To accommodate for the event that a physician is unable to respond to the page, the caller is advised prior to the termination of the call with the THAS nurse that he/she should proceed to the nearest emergency room if he/she has not received a call back from the THAS nurse or the on-call physician regarding their symptoms in 30 minutes.

Following contact with the THAS nurse, the on-call physician will have the option of speaking to the patient directly or having the THAS senior nurse call the patient back.

THAS Costs and Payments

The ministry is responsible for the costs associated with THAS and will also provide the monthly payment to FHTs for being on-call to the service.

Each FHT is responsible for determining the manner in which monthly payments are allocated among its members and staff.

Where to Get More Information

All potential Family Health Teams will be assigned a Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care FHT coordinator. This ministry contact person will be your guide to assist you to work through the details and options of establishing a FHT.

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, 9th 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 or the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care website at: http://www.health.gov.on.ca/transformation/fht/fht_mn.html

