



MANITOBA INSTITUTE
FOR PATIENT SAFETY

Make It Personal: Interview Series

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An Interview with Dr. Luis Oppenheimer

Dr. Luis Oppenheimer has had a long career in the medical system. His experience has provided him with a deep and complex understanding of the concept of patient safety. He is passionate about sharing the knowledge he has developed over the years in a variety of roles including being a trauma and acute care surgeon, an intensive care physician, Head of the Department of Surgery at the University of Manitoba, the Medical Director for the Telehealth program, and the Provincial Director for Patient Access and Clinical System Improvement. He also served 9 years as a Board Director with the Manitoba Institute for Patient Safety. He is keen to share everything he has learned with others so we can all work together to improve patient care.



The challenges of a complex system

Dr. Oppenheimer views patient safety as an individual's opportunity to interface with the health system without being harmed. "I haven't had experience with providers deliberately harming patients, but as our health system has become quite complex, we now have a design issue with the system that makes errors more likely. The more complexity that is involved in a system, the higher the probability of harm." Dr. Oppenheimer explains that hospitals have been historically designed for treating acute issues, and getting people in and out of them quickly. However, this approach is not as beneficial for a large number of people in our population that are aging with chronic conditions.

Safe and personal care for an aging population

To improve the safety of care for older adults with chronic conditions, Dr. Oppenheimer has a vision of relational care. "Having a longitudinal relationship with your Primary Care Provider (Family Physicians and Nurse Practitioners) and their team is really important for older adults like myself who tend to have multiple conditions that can't be cured." Dr. Oppenheimer explains, that your physician can get to know you over time, and this can avoid unnecessary medical interventions. For example, if you always have low blood pressure your physician will



102-175 Carlton Street
Winnipeg, MB R3C 3H9



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know this, and seeing that same physician can avoid getting unnecessary medical intervention. “When you know a patient, you can tell just by looking at them if something has changed. Relationships are important in providing good care – we need to balance between science, and relationship-building in order to provide and receive good care.”

Innovative approaches to improving

Dr. Oppenheimer has been a part of a project that is looking at how to improve healthcare design systems that is particularly relevant considering the COVID19 situation. The project is about implementing a system called “eConsult”. This system allows a primary care provider to access a specialist in a secure online system so they can ask a question without making a formal referral. The results of the project have been overwhelmingly positive – “eConsult” has helped to avoid unnecessary referrals, it often provides guidance so primary care providers can deal with the issue themselves if they can have their questions answered. Or if referrals are needed, advice is provided as appropriate diagnostic tests that would be helpful. Through this process, it also generates more knowledgeable providers, as they learn from this feedback process.

Become an Expert Patient

Dr. Oppenheimer feels that the best thing that people can do to stay safe is to become an expert about themselves. “You are the one who knows yourself best, and you need to be prepared to take on an expert role in communicating with health professionals.” To receive good continuity of care, you need to be knowledgeable about your own needs.

Dr. Oppenheimer continues to share his wisdom and ideas for health care system improvement in an academic position with the University of Manitoba. Not only does he have years of experience delivering care, he also is bound to help improve the health system by applying what he has learned as a patient in the system. Dr. Oppenheimer practices what he preaches - “I have a dossier with all of my health information that I take around with me, just in case. And I have a medic alert so that in case something ever happens to me, people will know how to provide me with the care I need”. We all can benefit from heeding Dr. Oppenheimer’s advice.

The Manitoba Institute for Patient Safety (MIPS) is an independent, not-for-profit corporation established in 2004 to promote and coordinate activities that improve patient safety and enhance quality healthcare in Manitoba.

Written by Cara Brown, MIPS Volunteer and Assistant Professor, Rady Faculty of Health Sciences, College of Rehabilitation Sciences