News

Starting small and picking up speed – with e-referrals and other IT tools

By Virginia McMillan
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E-referrals between GPs and specialists have reached 60,000 a month, National Health IT Board director Graeme Osborne says.

The board had reported in June a figure of more than 40,000 a month.

Electronic referring is under way in 17 or 18 DHBs, while five years ago, it was in just one DHB, Mr Osborne told a meeting of the New Zealand Private Surgical Hospitals Association.

In one case in Auckland, a referral was triaged and responded to in 31 minutes, he told attendees at the association's annual seminar in Wellington today.

He also said patient access to their own portals is accelerating "at a great rate".

Starting small, measuring uptake

Introduction of new health technologies under the board has been by starting with a small base and measuring speed of uptake, and this has worked, Mr Osborne says.

An example is pharmacies quickly picking up when a service was turned on four months ago, to show when a patient reached 20 prescriptions and no longer had to pay the $5 surcharge.

Mr Osborne reports that he expects within three years, all DHBs will use the same IT infrastructure. Their information will be hosted in the cloud and stored in servers that are off site rather than on their own servers in hospital buildings.

Private sector has vital population data

Meanwhile, the seminar discussed the private healthcare sector's involvement in providing health data to the Ministry of Health.

Association vice-president Ian England says back-end data on diagnoses and procedures can be provided but may be difficult for some member hospitals. The association will be identifying any barriers.

Officials have been meeting with sector representatives to discuss help the ministry might give with coding.

Mr England says the ministry can't see a compete picture of healthcare provided across the population,

without the private sector's data.

Private-sector sharing of individual patient information into health records has not been canvassed yet.

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