

East Kootenay Medical Office Assistant (MOA) Support and Resource Network

The East Kootenay MOA Support and Resource Network was established in 2020 through a collaboration led by EK Division of Family Practice and the Practice Support Program. The goal was to foster educational, personal, and professional growth opportunities for Medical Office Assistants (MOAs) in order to support job success and satisfaction.

Medical Office Assistants play an integral role in running efficient Family Practice Clinics across the East Kootenay region. The MOA role is critical to providing access to high-quality care for patients and improving professional satisfaction for physicians—this has never been more evident than during the uncertain and ever-changing times of the Covid-19 pandemic.

To Every Challenge....

In 2020 our regional physicians and MOAs came to us with a concern: MOAs were feeling under immense pressure and struggling to work in isolation. MOAs are frequently the first point of contact for patients, and often required to navigate difficult and/or emotional conversations, leading to job-related stress, burnout, and frustration.

The EK MOA Support and Resource Network was developed out of a shared recognition by physicians, Medical Office Assistants, the Practice Support Program, and the East Kootenay Division of Family Practice (the partners) of the need to empower, support, and address the concerns of the people who provide the scaffolding for primary care clinics in our communities.

There Is An Opportunity.

The EK MOA Network provides opportunities to build relationships between partners, empower MOAs and clinics with tools and resources to navigate the Covid-19 pandemic (and beyond), and positively impact patient care at ground level.

The EK MOA Support and Resource Network focused on three main principles:

- Building relationships between partners
- Empowering MOAs with tools and resources that would have a direct impact on the quality of patient care
- Providing a safe and supportive network for frontline clinic staff

Our Approach

Regional collaboration

Both the EK Division and Practice Support Program supports 17 primary care clinics across eight communities. It was important to us to find ways to include and support MOAs from all our communities.

Engaged MOAs early and continuously

We identified an MOA champion who worked with us to build the network. MOA leadership helped identify topics of interest and engagement opportunities. For example, one of the gaps identified was around Human Resource Support in the Clinics. The East Kootenay Division of Family Practice partnered with the College of the Rockies to offer HR Essentials, a Human Resources Course for Clinic Managers and Medical Office Assistants. The course focused on the challenges of managing people and strengthened skills around hiring, managing performance, and building team resiliency. It also offered a mentoring program that matched MOAs with peers to build a culture of knowledge sharing around office management and leadership.

Strategically integrated other EK Division projects into the MOA Network

We included presentations from Primary Care Network coaches and staff as part of our PCN change management process. It was an opportunity for the Medical Office Assistants to meet the newly integrated allied healthcare providers and better understand their role and relationship with the clinic. We also included presentations from project leads and contractors involved in ongoing Shared Care projects. For instance, the EK Division's Eating Disorder Clinic Evaluation project team delivered a presentation on how the Eating Disorder Clinic in Cranbrook functions. As well, EK Division's Gender Affirming Care project team gave a presentation by Trans Care BC.

Maintained a strong project partnership

A continuous project partnership helps to:

- Ensure topics and speakers are relevant and interesting
- Establish meeting formats and times that support clinic needs and schedules
- Brainstorm ways of encouraging attendance and expanding the scope

We went virtual

The EK MOA Support and Resource Network is supported virtually, which enables us to include all MOAs from across our broad region, which includes the communities of Cranbrook, Creston, Elkford, Fernie, Golden, Invermere, Kimberley, and Sparwood, B.C. Facilitated by three local East Kootenay MOAs, a closed Facebook group titled **MOA Support and Resource Group** was created for ongoing connection and information sharing.

Held monthly virtual MOA sessions

Our first monthly MOA led Zoom meeting took place May 2020. These monthly 1-hr sessions covered a broad range of topics including, but certainly not limited to: Burnout and Resiliency, Pathways BC, Public Health Protocols, Cultural Safety in Clinics, Gender Affirming Care, Eating Disorders, Emergency Preparedness, etc.

Evaluation

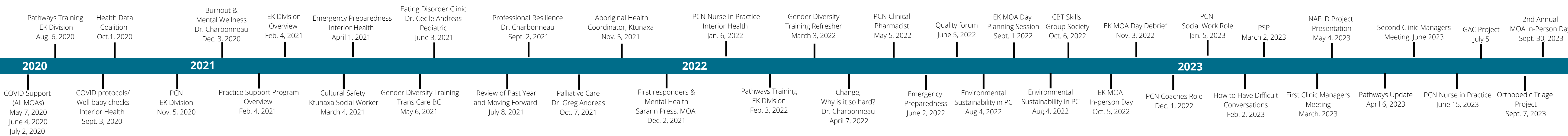
In July 2021 we created a simple evaluation form and distributed it to our MOA network to ensure we were meeting our goals of network development, support, relationship building and knowledge sharing.

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“The Covid-19 support happened at just the perfect time. We were getting inundated with information, and everything was changing hourly. It was so nice to connect with a community who was going through the same experiences, and we could share tips and tricks. I was grateful we had each other to lean on. Everyone benefits when we can empower, teach, and connect MOAs—the doctors, MOAs themselves, and the patients.”

~ Sarann Press, Medical Office Assistant, Fernie.

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Successes & Outcomes

- In two years, the network has grown from five MOA participants to 25 MOA participants across the East Kootenay communities of Cranbrook, Creston, Elkford, Fernie, Golden, Invermere, Kimberley and Sparwood.
- Covid-19 Support came at an essential time for MOAs, helping them keep current, stay connected, and implement best practice during a time when information was rapidly evolving.
- The MOA Network spread awareness and increased use of Pathways BC among MOAs, which supports, streamlines, and simplifies the patient referral process, resulting in more appropriate referrals, a reduction in re-referrals, and thereby more efficient patient care.
- Burnout Prevention with Tyler Charbonneau was particularly successful in that it provided the MOAs the chance to network with each other and understand they were in this together and experiencing similar difficulties. Resources were provided by Dr. Charbonneau.
- The Gender Affirming Care session was well received by MOAs, who communicated the training helped to provide the needed education to create a safer clinic environment to gender diverse people.

Challenges We Overcame

- Creating a space and process where MOAs were comfortable and felt both safe and supported to freely share their ideas, challenges, feelings, obstacles, and goals.
- Many MOAs did not have work email addresses so initially navigating direct communication was a bit of a challenge. We needed to go through either a clinic manager or physician to obtain consent for them to join the group.
- Our region spans two time zones! This means for half a calendar year, Creston MOAs join us at 7 a.m. to attend some sessions.



Looking Forward (Next Steps)

We are committed to planning and hosting more educational and professional support opportunities for MOAs, as well as looking forward to an in-person MOA Mentoring and Learning Day in the near future!

Grow the Clinic Managers Support Group, which currently meets quarterly.

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Special Thanks to Hanlie Du Plessis and Kerry Stanley from EK Division of Family Practice for their ongoing admin support, which was essential to the success of the MOA Network.



Practice Support Program