

## Embracing Caregivers in the Health System is Easier than You Might Think

Doing things differently starts with one conversation between two caring people. That's what Cornwall Hospital Vice-President **Christine Penney** told the plenary audience at the [5th Annual National Forum on Patient Experience](#) in Toronto (Ontario) on Tuesday, September 26, 2017.

In her presentation, Penney encouraged health system leaders to step back from collecting data on caregivers. "Instead," encouraged Penney, "ask caregivers about their experience and invite them to help make things better."

Using the [Embrace Project](#) as a case example, Penney described the telephone and focus-group interviews that had just been completed at Cornwall Hospital's addiction and mental health centre. Based on in-depth conversations with more than 200 caregivers who support loved ones with addiction and mental health problems, Penney reported having a clear understanding of the unique needs of caregivers in the hospital's catchment area and shared the project's new goals.

### **EMBRACE Project Goals:**

1. Create hope for family caregivers
2. Reduce family caregiver stress
3. Build family caregiver capacity
4. Include family caregivers

Family Peer Support Worker **Sharyn Duffey** added to the presentation with the perspective of the family caregiver, describing what it has been like to engage caregivers in a collaborative process. "At first, it seemed odd to invite caregivers and providers to come together for a project that we could not describe in a concrete way," said Duffey, "but it was exciting, too. We were able to tell caregivers that we were going to build something better by working directly with the providers in our community."

According to Embrace Project Manager **Joanne Sidorchuk**, 40 caregivers will be coming together with 40 healthcare providers on October 27<sup>th</sup> to exchange ideas at an experience-based co-design workshop. "One thing is already crystal clear," says Sidorchuk. "Engaging caregivers in the health system is a lot easier than you might think. We may even be over-subscribed for our co-design event next week!"

That's the sort of excitement that can build a better community hospital.

### **Related Links:**

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