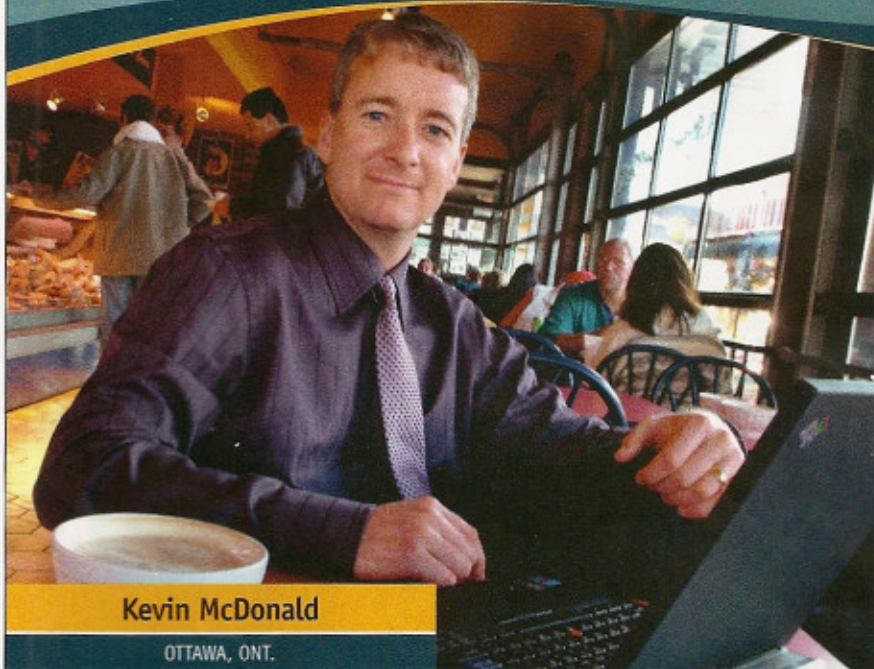


Technological Innovation



Kevin McDonald

OTTAWA, ONT.

Overcoming barriers to patient care

THREE OF NORTHERN ONTARIO'S remote rural hospitals are getting regular access to full-time pharmacist services for the first time ever, thanks to the determination and technical savvy of Ottawa pharmacist Kevin McDonald.

Since launching a telepharmacy service at the Weeneebayko Hospital, a 60-bed facility in Moose Factory in April 2004, McDonald has set up others in Timmins and Deep River. In fact, it is for these initiatives that McDonald is the 2006 recipient of the Commitment to Care Award for Technological Innovation.

"The essential idea behind this program is that living in rural or remote areas should not be a barrier to receiving essential medical care," says McDonald. Using an inexpensive setup, which

includes a 1-800 number, basic computer equipment, software and a videoconferencing camera, Moose Factory's Weeneebayko Hospital now has regular, full-time access to McDonald, who provides video and telephone consulting from his Ottawa home office.

A pharmacy technician at the remote site sends a copy of a physician's medication order and a patient's medical record to McDonald by fax or email or posts it on the hospital's computer system through a secure portal, which McDonald can then access. He reviews the order and discusses any medication-related issues with medical staff at the remote site.

The pharmacy technician then fills the order and a second technician checks the final product. If a reliable broadband connection is available, McDonald can verify the technician's work with a videoconferencing camera, which can zoom in to see details of the dispensed medication. If there are issues with the medication, McDonald can also alert the physician or nurse for clarification.

Using the teleconferencing equipment,

McDonald can also attend patient-care rounds, hospital meetings and operate a pharmacy-directed warfarin dosing program directly from his home office.

"The success of the initial program has led the model to be expanded to two other northern hospitals [in Timmins and Deep River]," says fellow pharmacist Kurt Schroeder, who nominated McDonald for the award. Schroeder took McDonald's model to Timmins where he has supported that community's hospital from his home since September 2005. Another program is up and running in Deep River.

Moose Factory's wasn't the first telepharmacy program, however. In June 2003, the East Kootenay Regional Hospital in Cranbrook, B.C. launched Canada's first when a hospital in a neighbouring town couldn't recruit a pharmacist.

Susan McLeod, director of Weeneebayko Health Ahtuskaywin, says McDonald's program has provided "full pharmacy care" to the hospital and its patients.

Commitment to Care judges called McDonald's program "brilliant" and were impressed by his commitment to patient care by using technology to overcome geographical barriers. "I would imagine that these initiatives help to facilitate safer health care in addition to preventing and resolving drug-related problems," says one judge.

—Frank Armstrong

WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?

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