



Unity Health Toronto's Patient and Family Partner Program Year in Review 2024

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Letter from the Vice President, Clinical Programs, Quality and Equity

An incredible year for Patient and Family Partnership at Unity Health Toronto

The Patient and Family Partner (PFP) Year in Review is a wonderful opportunity to pause, reflect, and give thanks for the progress we've made in improving the care experience for Unity Health patients, residents, and families, and for the work of our PFPs.

As I read the year in review, I was reminded how our dedicated PFPs provide invaluable leadership that helps us make meaningful strides in improving the patient experience. Through their diverse experiences and perspectives, they inspire and guide us toward providing better health care. From shaping policies to serving on advisory councils, their voices are essential to fostering an inclusive, equitable, and compassionate care environment.

This past year, Unity Health achieved a transformative milestone: the successful launch of our new electronic patient record (EPR)—and the associated patient portal, MyChart. We are especially grateful to the PFPs who served as members of the Project Connect Patient Family Advisory Council. Supported by their deliberations and recommendations, we have been able to achieve better accessibility and inclusivity, empowering more of our patients with better access to their health information.

This is a big step forward in ensuring a more connected and personalized health care experience for all.

I also want to note the vital role that PFPs play in advancing equity at Unity Health. Their advocacy led to the inclusion of free-text options in our new EPR, allowing patients to document disabilities and accommodations into their chart. Their guidance toward implementing new sexual orientation and gender identity fields was instrumental to supporting improved care experiences and health outcomes for 2SLGBTQIA+ patients and clients.

PFPs also contributed to our 2024-2029 Unity Health Accessibility Plan, which aims to identify any accessibility barriers, and prevent and remove future barriers, strengthening our commitment to making healthcare accessible to everyone.

We also celebrate the many achievements of the Unity Health Patient Family Council. Their insights shaped important patient-facing policies such as the Goals of Care and CPR Status Policy and Visitor Policy. They influenced corporate strategic planning and priority setting, and advised on important initiatives including Home First, which helps patients remain at home whenever possible. Their dedication continues to drive meaningful improvements in quality, safety, and patient engagement.

As we look ahead to 2025, we remain focused on wait times, access to care, strengthening how we measure and improve the care experience, keeping patients safe, and using our new electronic patient record to improve care for everyone we serve. These priorities are shaped by the collective wisdom of our PFPs, whose partnership is essential to our work.

This Patient and Family Partner Year in Review celebrates the collective impact of the contributions of our PFPs. It is a testament to the strength, compassion, and commitment they bring to Unity Health. We are grateful for their partnership and excited to continue this journey of co-creating the best care experiences together.

Sincerely,

Irfan Dhalla

Vice President, Clinical Programs, Quality and Equity

Patient and Family Partner Program

At Unity Health, our vision is the best care experiences, created together. Patient and Family Partners (PFPs) work alongside hospital staff, physicians and leaders to enhance the quality and safety of care delivery while striving to improve the overall care experience of patients and their families.

PFPs represent diverse perspectives from the communities we serve, contributing to organizational goals and initiatives related to quality and safety priorities, policies, procedures, communication plans, and educational resources. Drawing upon their personal experiences as patients, family members, or caregivers, PFPs play a crucial role in advancing a culture of patient and family partnered care at Unity Health.

Below are examples of how the PFP program has grown over the past year; creating new opportunities to further integrate PFPs in all we do.

PFPs by the numbers



Collective # of years of PFP dedication at Unity Health



Different programs engaged PFPs



PFPs actively engaged in at least one activity



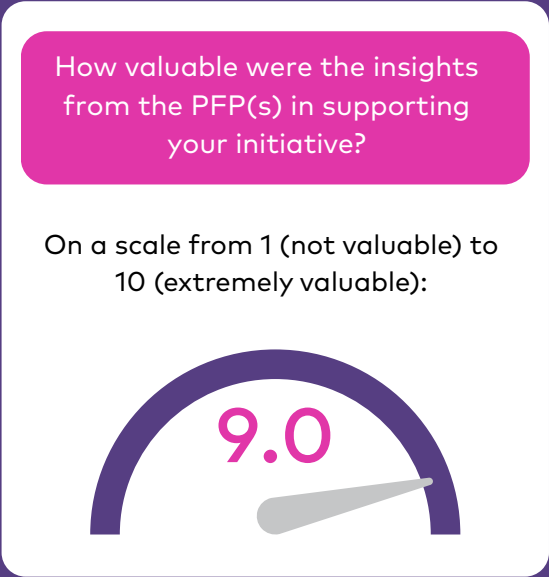
New PFP activities

We are committed to embedding PFPs in all we do at Unity Health Toronto. This includes the identification and creation of new opportunities each year. The graphic below demonstrates the diversity of net new activities and partnerships our PFPs were engaged in over the past year.



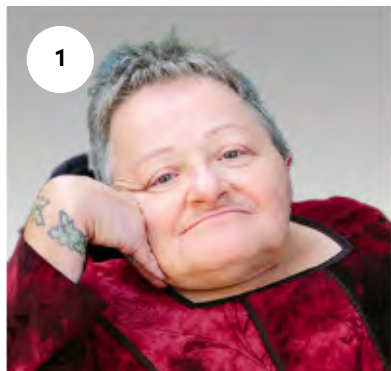
PFP impact

We asked all staff who partnered with PFPs in 2024 to evaluate their experience:



Spotlight on engagement

It has been a busy year for the PFP Program. Here are a few highlights of the over 68 events and initiatives Unity Health PFPs partnered on.



Fran Odette, Janet Rodriguez



Left: Judi Richter-Jacobs



Disrupting ableism

July & October 2024

1

PFPs Fran Odette and Janet Rodriguez, along with Unity Health staff, co-created a two-hour virtual collaborative learning activity about disrupting ableism in healthcare that was successfully offered on two occasions, to over 50 learners.

Compassion, recycled

Ongoing

2

PFPs used their lived experience to provide input on promotional materials for a Compassionate Equipment Recycling Program, offering used wheelchairs and walkers to individuals experiencing difficulty accessing equipment or who lack the means to purchase needed equipment.

Voices in action

September 2024

3

PFP Judi Richter-Jacobs joined fellow PFPs in a world café-style engagement in which participants rotated through different emerging priorities and shared their input to inform Unity Health's next three-year Education Strategic Plan.



Lauren McDougall

6

Manager Interview Questions

Competition #: _____
 Status of Position: _____
 Candidate Name: _____
 Internal / External: _____
 Interview Date: _____
 Interviewer: _____
 Interview Panel: _____

INTRO

Lead Interviewer: Welcomes candidate, review interview purpose and structure of interview, provide short summary of unit.

For external candidates only, please read:
 As a condition of employment, you are required to submit proof of COVID-19 vaccination to the Hospital's Corporate Health Safety, Security and Wellness department. Successful candidates will be required to submit proof of COVID-19 vaccination (both doses) from the Ontario Ministry of Health website or other authorized source, and they must be in Ontario (all candidates). In the event that you are unable to be vaccinated as a result of a ground protected under the Human Rights Code, you may submit a written explanation of the ground and any supporting documentation to determine if you are exempt from this requirement to the Human Resources team. A Human Resources representative may follow up with you for further information if necessary.

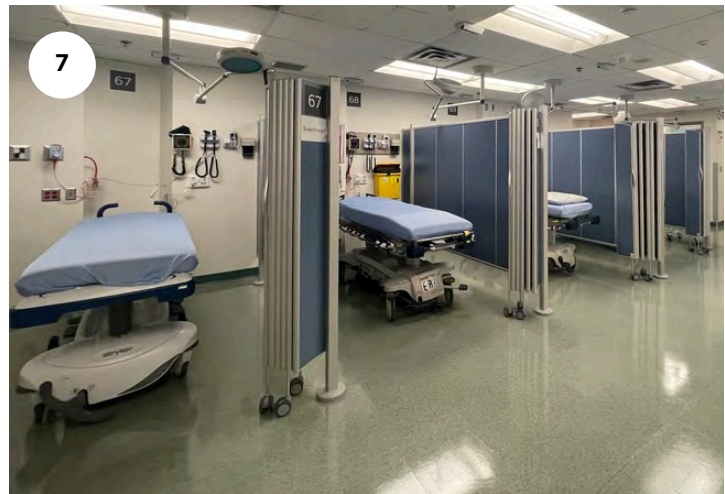
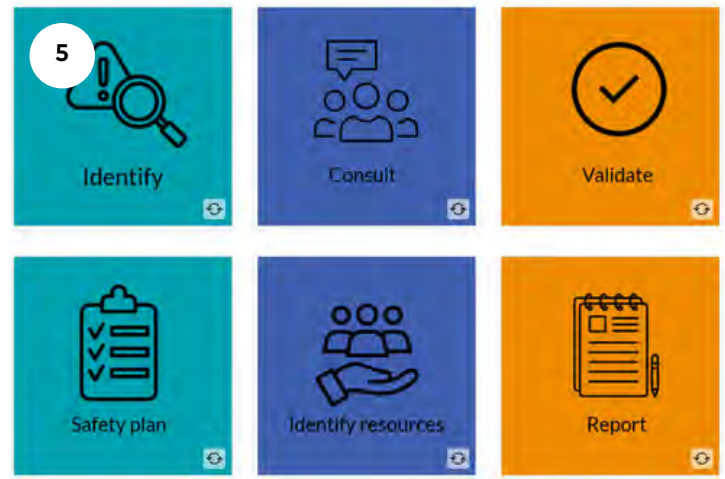
If you are the chosen candidate, please be aware that if you are currently on a work permit, you will be required to provide a copy of the work permit at time of hire.

CONFIRM POSTED REQUIREMENTS:

Requirement:	Yes / No / In progress

RATING SCALE DEFINITIONS

1 Unsatisfactory Candidate does not provide an acceptable response to the question. Response may be incomplete or not address the question. Response contains none of the expected responses. Significant probing is required.	2 Below Expectations Response doesn't fully convey the level of experience/competence & competencies required. Response covers some of the expected responses, but not quite at the level that would be ideal. Candidate's understanding of the issues at hand is slightly less than required, some probing necessary.
3 Meets Expectations Candidate provides an acceptable response to the question. Response contains most of the expected response, at the level that demonstrates sufficient experience/competence to meet requirements. Overall, response is complete, addresses the question, probing is minimal.	4 Exceeds Expectations Candidate provides a thorough and well-presented response to the question, which demonstrates an in-depth understanding of the issues at hand that is more than the job requires. Response contains most or all of the expected responses. Provides a relevant example that demonstrates competencies required. Overall, response is complete, addresses all aspects of the



Lights, camera, action!

June 2024

4

PFP Lauren McDougall recorded her story that will contribute to the Online Health Library for staff and learners to gain knowledge from the lived experiences of our PFPs.

Stronger together

January 2024

5

PFPs reviewed and provided feedback on a new online learning module for Unity Health staff, physicians, and learners that aimed to establish clear guidelines on identification, screening, intervention, mandatory reporting, and resources on abuse and neglect.

You're hired!

Ongoing

6

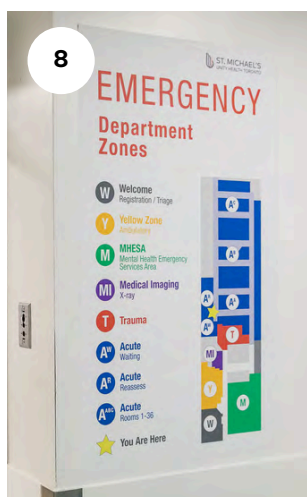
PFPs participated as members of 16 leadership-level hiring panels to ensure new staff at Unity Health live our values and dedication to patient and family-partnered care.

Care with dignity

May 2024

7

PFPs joined forces with the Redevelopment Team and St. Joseph's Emergency Department staff to develop the plans for a dedicated and secure senior-friendly space for elderly patients and caregivers.



Michael Nickerson, Vanessa Nicholas-Schmidt, Jennifer Schultz, Donna Romano, Leah Xing, Andy Harris-Cartwright



Comfort meets care

Ongoing

8

PFPs partnered with a multi-disciplinary team to enhance the St. Michael's Emergency Department experience—making it more welcoming, comfortable, informative, and secure. Key improvements included enhanced wayfinding (e.g. updated signage and colour scheme), accessibility and communication (e.g. wait time dashboards, educational resources), and added comfort features (e.g. vending machine, device charging stations).

Learning & sharing

October 2024

9

PFPs used their lived experience to help establish a Stroke Patient and Family Learning Corner on the St. Michael's Hospital stroke unit. This corner will ensure standards and best practices are met in terms of patient and family stroke education and resources.

Let's celebrate!

Ongoing

10

The Our Shared Values Awards celebrate staff, physicians, volunteers, and PFPs who exemplify a commitment to living our values. PFPs offer a unique perspective to the selection committee, having personally experienced our values in action as recipients of clinical care. They bring a meaningful dimension to the recognition process, ensuring that those who truly embody these values are honoured.

Golden spotlight

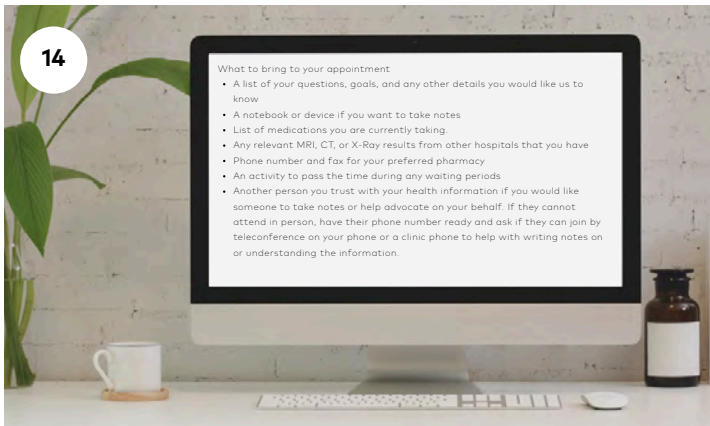
June 2024

11

PFPs participated on the Seniors Month planning committee to create a packed agenda recognizing and celebrating seniors. Some of the many events planned included: live music, bake sale fundraiser, open house and resource fair, and education on important topics affecting seniors.



Terrie Russell, Alison White



And the winner is...

March 2024

12

This year, nine PFPs participated on the Health Disciplines Awards Selection Committee which recognizes the contributions and impact of our Health Discipline clinicians teams in the areas of: interprofessional team collaboration, clinical excellence, leadership, innovation, and health equity and social accountability.

Quality matters

Ongoing

13

The Unity Health Executive Quality Committee is accountable for overseeing the development and implementation of the organizational strategy to improve the quality of care we provide and the experience of our patients. PFPs Terrie Russell and Alison White are important members of this Council, ensuring that the perspective of patients and families is reflected in its work.

Meaningful changes

August 2024

14

Staff at the St. Michael's Chronic Pain Clinic partnered with PFPs to better understand the experiences of patients who visit their clinic. This partnership led to the development of orientation materials for new patients, which will improve the patient journey for all who attend.

Partnering for better care

May 2024

15

Clients from the St. Michael's Rapid Access Addiction Medicine Clinic participated in a 1.5 hour engagement session where they shared their lived experiences as clients in the clinic. They shared ideas for improving patient-partnered care including staff education (e.g. harm reduction), communication (e.g. other available services), and service enhancements (e.g. increased hours).

Here's what Unity Health Staff and PFPs had to say about partnering:

“

Being a PFP allows me to give back to the Hospital that our family has been involved with for over 25 years. It shows me the commitment that Unity Health has to its patients and staff to constantly improve and change what's not working. It's easy to sit back and be critical, it's harder to make the time to become an agent of positive change. Being a PFP has allowed me to do just that.

- Helen Lepek, PFP

“

Working with PFP's helped us create a tailored questionnaire for our patients in the transplant clinics helping us to better understand their education needs. Our PFPs were invaluable to this quality improvement project as their own perspective of the questions helped us to change how we ask them to way that allowed us to get the answers we were looking for.

- Emily Campbell, Care & Transitions Facilitator – Kidney & Metabolism Program

“

As a PFP, I'm privileged to be able to bring the patient and family voice to Unity Health projects to ensure we are providing a person-centred care environment and experience for all.

- Andrea Kerton, PFP

“

Working as a PFP ensures the patient and family perspective is heard and honoured.

- Rosa Militano, PFP

“

So much gratitude goes out to our group of PFPs who are an integral role in the shaping and bringing the TTrACE Academy to life. Their contributions of time, shared stories, experiences, and ideas along with their energy and passion for the build and roll-out of TTrACE are invaluable. Their continued engagement in the sessions provide the reminder to the participant why the “how we do our work” matters to the care being provided. It's been my absolute pleasure to be a witness to the impact they have on our teams.

- Kari Carhart, Senior Clinical Program Director – Surgery, Critical Care & Bariatric Centre of Excellence

“

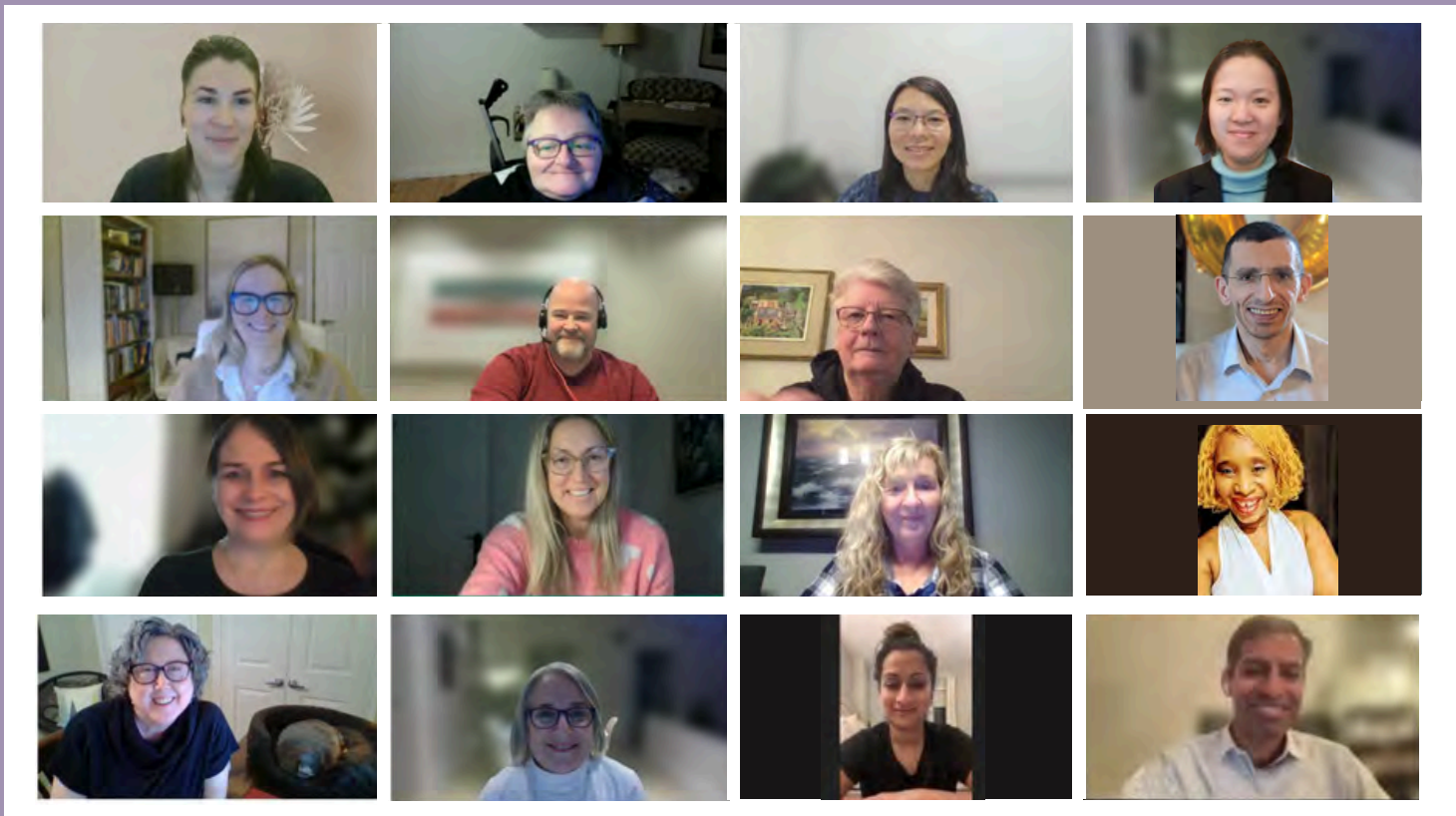
I am honoured to be a PFP, as it gives me the opportunity to give back to St. Mike's for the exceptional care my parents and I have received. Unity Health is truly dedicated to providing compassionate, family-centered care for everyone. As a PFP, I am grateful for the privilege of playing a small part in ensuring Unity Health continues to provide exceptional care.

- Sharon Tonner-Clarkson, PFP

“

The PFPs bring a unique perspective which would be lost without their participation. I think it is useful to have a view point that is different than those of us who are buried deep in the work. That can often lead to blinders being on and a new perspective is important to shake things up.

- Katelyn Poyntz, Director Project Engineering & Energy



*Top (L-R): Emeraldal Burke, Fran Odette, Suehlan Yu; Leah Xing; 2nd row: Cathy O'Neill, Harry Ennis, Liz Gabbott, Hesham Ghobarah;
3rd Row: Heather Braithwaite, Sally-Ann Johnson, Sharon Tonner-Clarkson; Latoya Aldridge; Bottom: Nicole Magson, Bari Zittell, Tanya Mahmood, Irfan Dhalla*

Spotlight on the Unity Health Patient Family Council

About the Council:

Established in 2022, The Unity Health Patient Family Council (PFC) consists of 15 passionate Patient and Family Partners who bring unique and diverse lived experiences as Unity Health patients, family members, and caregivers to support Unity Health's vision of best care experiences created together.

Patient and Family Partner Co-Chairs Suehlan Yu and Harry Ennis lead the charge, supported by four staff members. The council holds monthly virtual meetings from September to June.

The PFC provide input on patient-facing initiatives, projects, and policies as well as corporate initiatives such as strategic planning, safety, and quality improvement. They also provide oversight into the overarching Patient and Family Partner program.

How they make a difference:

The PFC offers a forum for the organization to seek and learn from the patient and family perspective. Promoting a culture of patient- and family-partnered care within Unity Health, the PFC, together with staff and leadership co-create strategies to improve and enhance the delivery of high-quality, accessible and safe care.

The Council effects change by:

- Informing or co-creating patient-facing policies and guidelines such as the Visitor Policy, and the Goals of Care and CPR Status Policy.
- Co-creating Patient and Family Partner Program process improvements.
- Providing input on corporate strategic planning and annual priority setting.
- Advising on how to communicate important initiatives like Thank Your Healthcare Provider, with an emphasis on messaging that is inclusive and accessible.
- Informing initiatives that improve and celebrate the care experience such as Home First, which aims to support patients to remain at home whenever possible.
- Providing input into the Patient Experience and Patient Safety Domains of the 2025-2026 Quality Improvement Plan.

What's next:

The PFC continues to evolve with a continued emphasis on patient and family engagement and creating the best care experiences. Over the next year, the PFC is focused on the following:

- Partnering with planning and redevelopment to improve wayfinding across our three hospital sites.
- Providing proactive input on quality and patient safety priorities as part of our annual Quality Improvement Plan.
- Providing ongoing input on changes/enhancements to the new Electronic Patient Record.
- Supporting initial planning for Accreditation 2026.
- Partnering with staff to develop and disseminate a Sociodemographic Survey to understand PFP membership and strengthen diverse recruitment.
- Advising on initiatives and patient-facing policies that impact the patient experience including the Service Animal, Pet Visitation, and Patient Belongings policies.

To learn more about the Patient Family Council, contact the patient experience team at patientexperience@unityhealth.to





How Patient and Family Partners helped shape Unity Health's new Electronic Patient Record

Unity Health Toronto launched its new electronic patient record (EPR) system on November 30, 2024. The new network-wide EPR, powered by globally-recognized vendor Epic Systems, is a step in the process of transforming the organization's digital infrastructure to improve experiences for patients, families and care teams.

Patient and Family Partners (PFPs) played a crucial role in the preparation and education process leading up to the launch of the new EPR, providing invaluable insights and guidance to ensure the transformation was as inclusive, accessible, and representative as possible.

The Patient and Family Advisory Council, which includes six PFPs alongside Unity Health leaders, physicians, staff and Epic staff, supported decision making for a wide range of functionalities in MyChart, Epic's patient portal.

BUILDING WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE IN MIND

From the very beginning, PFPs worked to ensure that the new EPR system reflected the diverse needs and experiences of Unity Health's patients, families and communities.

PFPs Harry Ennis and Bev Lennox shared how including people with lived experiences in the design process was essential to making the system user-friendly, particularly for users with limited technical skills.

"Often there are insights staff can gain from having those voices at the table of how things have worked, how things can be improved and simply what will and won't work from a patient point of view," said Ennis.

Ennis lives with a mobility disability. He recalled one experience when he was assigned to a small treatment room.

"I have limited range of motion in both knees, so the health care professionals had to climb over me to access the computer," he said. "It didn't feel great."

To avoid situations like this, Unity Health's new EPR system allows patients to add disabilities and accommodations into their chart. The system contains open-text spaces rather than check boxes or drop-down menus so that patients can write about their specific needs. Staff and physicians can use this information to plan before appointments.

This decision for open-text spaces was made following months of consultation with patients and partners like Ennis.

Hear from patients on how MyChart can help you throughout your care journey



Patient and Family Partners played a vital role in promoting MyChart and supporting educational efforts to ensure a smooth transition for patients adopting the platform. They shared their personal care experiences for an animated video designed to help patients and families better understand the benefits of using MyChart.

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL IDENTITIES

PFPs also supported work to ensure that the EPR offers inclusive features that are representative of sexual orientation, gender identity, and cultural preferences.

The system allows patients to self-identify their gender, pronouns, sexual orientation, and chosen name. It also gives them more control over when and how they share this information, providing them with the option to update their records themselves or have a clinician assist them.

"We always say 'knowledge is power'," said Ennis. "Now we have greater access to our own records and can be better prepared, and better able to participate as an equal with our health care teams."

CHAMPIONING ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL

PFPs, along with Unity Health's Equity of Access Committee, staff, physicians, and other working groups, helped ensure that the EPR and MyChart are accessible for individuals with visual, hearing, or cognitive impairments, and that they support multiple languages, cultural preferences and beliefs.

"It's essential to understand how things work from a patient's point of view and what improvements are necessary to make the system more accessible and effective," said Lennox.

The result is a user-friendly system that reflects the real world needs of patients, families and communities and minimizes barriers to accessing care.

A FUTURE OF COLLABORATION

The impact of the new EPR system extends beyond simply improving access to health records. It empowers patients to take a more active role in their health care, offering them greater control and visibility.

Through their dedication, knowledge, and lived experience, PFPs have played an important role in shaping the EPR system into a tool that doesn't just store information—but transforms the patient experience itself.

By giving patients more control over their health care journey, we are fostering an environment of respect, dignity, and collaboration.



THANK YOU!

We are grateful to our dedicated Unity Health Patient and Family Partners for their contributions this past year.

Our 2024 Patient and Family Partners:

Alan Meisner
Alison White
Alla Tsipis
Andrea Kerton
Andrea Paras
Andy Harris-Cartwright
Angela Cianfrini
Anne Whiteside
Anonymous
Barbara Fallon
Barbara Switzer
Bari Zittell
Brigee Tracy
Catherine Heroux
Cassie Van Wiechen
Charles Musa
Christy Morrison
Connie Zwingerman
Cristina Evans

Don Ross
Eileen Laffey
Elizabeth Racz
Ellen Lueck
Faith Jenner
Faye Hart
Fran Odette
Francisco Garcia
Harry Ennis
Heather Braithwaite
Helen Lepek
Helen Sklarz
Hesham Ghobarah
Hollie Devlin
Isabella Spensieri
Janet Rodriguez
Jennifer Schultz
Jerry Hille
Jesse Mirsky

Jessica Ramlakhan
Jim Fremlin
Joanne Lerner
John DiLallo
Jse Che Lam
Judi Richter-Jacobs
Katherine Koulas
Katherine Smith
Latoya Aldridge
Lauren McDougall
Leah Xing
Leanne Castorina
Liz Gabbott
Luke Wilmschurst
Lynn Bailey
Marcia Zalev
Mary Mullen
Maryann Croft Maloney
Michael Nickerson
Michelle Rhodenizer-Boswell

Michelle Wang
Murray Powell
Naomi Zittell
Nicole Magson
Peter Legat
Randy Pascucci
Riki Bhogal
Rosa Militano
Rose Kudlac
Sara LoGrasso
Sharon Tonner-Clarkson
Suehlan Yu
Sybil Wilkinson
Tanya Mahmood
Tanya Peters
Terrie Russell
Tracey Hamilton
Vicki Faulkner
Yasir Khalid



**Want to learn more or apply to become a
Patient and Family Partner at Unity Health?**

Scan the QR code or email patientexperience@unityhealth.to