Making the Most of Your Digital Health Care

How to Use Digital Tools With Your Health Care Team:
Co-created With Patients and Caregivers

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UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
AMS

Enhance Your Digital Health Care

More health care is moving to digital options (for example, to video calls). At the same time, you still want personal, human relationships with your healthcare team.

This guide is to help you and your care team use technology to:

- share information about your health
- work together with compassion and trust
- improve your healthcare experience
- make health care more accessible

Examples of Digital Health Tools

Virtual Care

Virtual care is when you interact with any healthcare team member remotely using communication technology (for example, by phone call or video call).

Resource: Benefits of Virtual Care

Health Applications

Health applications (apps) help you track things like your daily steps, heart rate, blood pressure, sleep quality, food, mood, menstruation or other health conditions or symptoms.

Resource: Examples of Health Apps

Patient Portals

Patient portals are websites that allow you to access your medical records and test results. For example, you might easily log into the secure portal to see your next appointment or last test result.

Resource: myUHN Patient Portal E-Brochure

Artificial Intelligence-Powered Health Tools

Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies can help streamline and personalize your healthcare journey. For example, you may want to ask AI-powered chats and phone helplines about symptoms or to make an appointment.

Resource: Woebot Health

How to Use This Guide

This guide covers 4 related topics. Based on your needs, you can focus on some or all of the topics and explore them in any order. Click on any title below to open the topic:

- Building a Relationship With Your Healthcare Providers
- Communicating What Is Most Important to You
- Collaborating With Your Healthcare Providers
- Connecting With Your Personal Care Team

Building a Relationship With Your Healthcare Providers

What are your health needs? What do you expect your provider to support you with? Communicating openly about these questions will help you build an effective digital relationship to support your health care and create a sense of comfort.

Here are some questions to ask yourself and example questions to ask others, including providers and administrative staff:

Personal reflection questions to ask yourself:	Example questions you could ask your provider or clinic admin:
Before your appointment:	
❑ What would help me trust my provider when I communicate with them virtually? ❑ What would make me feel safe and prepared to advocate for myself in my appointment? ❑ Are my video and audio quality and settings as good as possible for the virtual appointment?	❑ "How can we make sure my care plan reflects my needs, goals and priorities?" ❑ "What are the different ways we can update or share my personal health information with each other? Email? Phone call? A message in the patient portal? Secure messaging? ❑ "How is my personal health information kept safe and private?" ❑ "What technical support is available if I have any problems with the platform?" ❑ "Can I include someone from my support system in my appointment?" ❑ "What resources are available if I need extra emotional support after my appointment?"
During your appointment:	
❑ How do I know that my provider is listening to my needs and concerns? ❑ Have I expressed to my provider how I feel about this discussion? For example, have I said that this discussion is important to me?	❑ "Can I share my list of questions and concerns that I have prepared for you to help me with?" ❑ "Can you make a note in my chart so that the rest of my care team knows my concern, and I don't have to repeat myself?" ❑ "If we are disconnected, what should I do? Is there someone I could contact for technical support?" ❑ "At the end of my appointment, will I be given notes or a summary from the appointment?" ❑ "What specific features does the patient portal have for managing my health information? For example, can it help me access test results, schedule appointments or ask for prescription refills?"

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At the end of your appointment or after:	
❑ Was I able to follow and understand my provider throughout the appointment? ❑ Are there any outstanding questions to address now? For example, what are the next steps? ❑ Did I feel heard and supported throughout the appointment? ❑ How comfortable and confident did I feel using technology for my appointment?	❑ "What is the best way to communicate if I have follow-up questions? For example, should I email or phone?" ❑ "When should I have a follow-up visit?" ❑ "How soon after a visit or test can I expect to see the information in the patient portal?" ❑ "Who can I contact to help me set up and navigate the patient portal?" ❑ "What are some online resources I can use to learn more about my healthcare needs?"

Examples Into Practice

1.

June struggles to manage her anxiety. She has an appointment with her therapist, Dr. Garcia. June values open communication and trust with her care providers.

2.

June greets Dr. Garcia:

Hello, Dr. Garcia. It's nice to see you virtually. Thanks for meeting with me. I'm looking for ways to manage my anxiety.

If we're going to work together, it's important for me to have a good relationship with you.

3.

Dr. Garcia asks June to call her Ana.

Hi June. Call me Ana.

June feels at ease and asks Ana about her treatment plan by saying:

Could you tell me more about your approach to anxiety? I want to understand how we can work together to develop coping strategies.

Thanks for your support today, Ana. It's comforting to have someone I can trust.

4.

Dr. Garcia books a follow-up appointment and encourages ongoing communication. She says:

June, let's book our next virtual appointment in 2 weeks. In the meantime, reach out if you have any questions or concerns.

Click here to view **helpful resources.**

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Communicating What Is Most Important to You

Sometimes navigating the healthcare system is challenging. Think about your healthcare needs, goals and priorities to help you communicate to your providers what matters most to you.

Here are some questions to ask yourself and example questions to ask others, including providers and administrative staff:

Personal reflection questions to ask yourself:	Example questions you could ask your provider or clinic admin:
Before your appointment:	
❑ How comfortable am I with virtual care and the platforms for this? Is this the best approach for my specific condition? ❑ Have I chosen specific goals for my care plan? ❑ Do I need any accommodations to prepare for my virtual appointment? ❑ Do I need any language accommodations, such as an interpreter, for my virtual appointment?	❑ "I would like to discuss if my appointment should be a phone call or video call, and how it would work?" ❑ "Can you tell me about the patient portal or virtual care platform and its features?" ❑ "Can I ask for an interpreter or any accommodations through the patient portal for better communication during the virtual appointment?" ❑ "What technical requirements do I need to meet for a virtual appointment?" ❑ "If my provider is late to the appointment, how can I stay connected or reschedule the visit?"
During your appointment:	
❑ Have I made notes or prepared questions to make sure I cover all the aspects of my care connected to the appointment? ❑ Am I expressing my needs clearly during virtual care? ❑ Do I understand my care plan and treatment options? ❑ What challenges do I face during my virtual appointment?	❑ "Can we discuss my accommodation first, before we get started?" ❑ "If I find virtual care challenging or uncomfortable, are there options we can explore?" ❑ "Are there ways my support system can join virtual appointments and ask questions for me or with me?" ❑ "Can I send a secure message through my patient portal to someone on my care team? If so, how long does a response often take?" ❑ "What is the most secure way to share my personal health information during our appointment?" ❑ "Does the patient portal work well with other health-related apps or devices I might be using? For example, does it work with fitness trackers or wearable monitors?"

At the end of your appointment or after:	
❑ What are my specific concerns about using virtual care?	❑ "How can I give feedback about my virtual care experience?"
❑ Were my needs met during the virtual appointment?	❑ "Are there any patient satisfaction surveys I can fill out?"
❑ Did I address any specific privacy or security concerns I had before or during the appointment?	❑ "What guides or other resources are there to help patients make best use of the patient portal or virtual care tools?"
❑ Did we take any steps to make sure virtual care is safe and private?	❑ "How can we improve communication between me and my healthcare team during virtual appointments? How can we do this with my support team?"
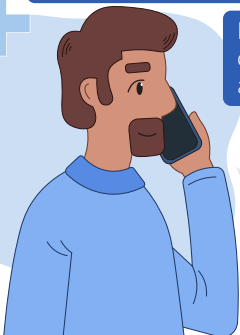
Examples into Practice

1.
Ahmed has chronic back pain. He booked a virtual appointment with Dr. Chen, a specialist in pain management. Ahmed wants to make sure his virtual care experience is comfortable and effective.

Before the appointment, Ahmed contacts the hospital about the appointment. He asks:

What options are available for virtual appointments? Is there support if I need it?
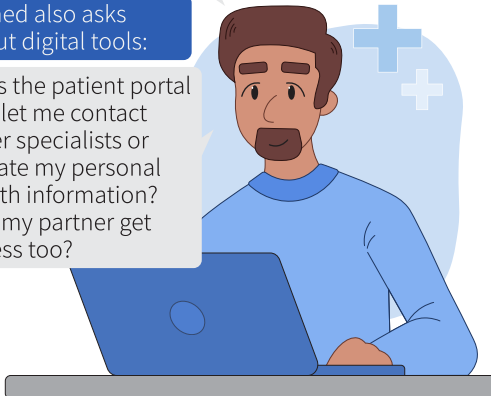
2.
In the appointment, Dr. Chen discusses possible treatments. Ahmed takes an active role and asks questions, such as:

What about pros and cons of each option? I want to know what works best with my lifestyle.

Ahmed also asks about digital tools:

Does the patient portal app let me contact other specialists or update my personal health information? Can my partner get access too?
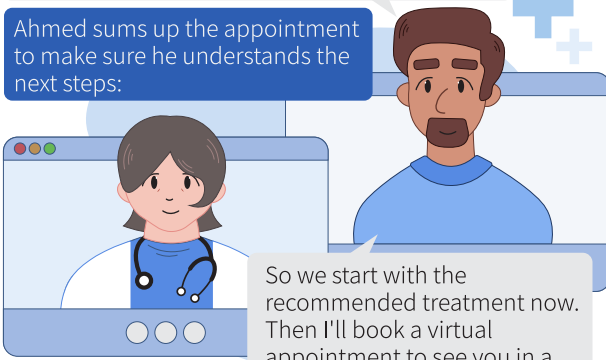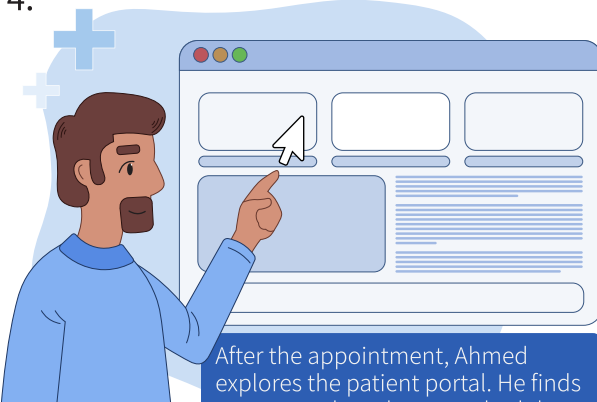
3.
Near the end of the appointment, Ahmed asks:

How will you keep track of how I'm doing? I want to make sure that any problems are found early so we can adjust my treatment.

Ahmed sums up the appointment to make sure he understands the next steps:

So we start with the recommended treatment now. Then I'll book a virtual appointment to see you in a few weeks to talk about how things are going. If I have any questions before that, how should I contact you?

4.
After the appointment, Ahmed explores the patient portal. He finds resources about how to schedule appointments and message his provider. He gives feedback on his experience using the portal.

Click here to view **helpful resources.**

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Collaborating With Your Healthcare Providers

You are the one getting care, and it is important to work together with your care provider. To do this, you should communicate your needs and expectations. In this way, your providers can create a care plan that is right for you.

Here are some questions to ask yourself and example questions to ask others, including providers and administrative staff:

| Personal reflection questions to ask yourself:	Example questions you could ask your provider or clinic admin:
Before your appointment:	
❑ What should I tell my provider? ❑ What boundaries or rules need to be set between my provider and me? ❑ How can I work together with my provider on my care plan?	❑ "I have a list of 5 questions to share with my provider. Will there be enough time to discuss the list and some of those 5 questions in the appointment?" ❑ "I would love to discuss this specific topic with my provider…. When is the best time during the appointment to do that?" ❑ "Should I make notes during the appointment? Or will I get summary notes after the appointment?"
During your appointment:	
❑ Am I able to express my healthcare needs to my provider? ❑ How can my provider and I work together to create a plan during the appointment? ❑ Do I feel like my voice is heard? ❑ Are there any digital tools I can use to help reach my health goals? Do I know how to use these tools?	❑ "Based on my list of questions and concerns, what can we prioritize in this appointment?" ❑ "If we don't address all my questions in this appointment, what is the best way to address the rest of them?" ❑ "Can we discuss my care plan together? I want to make sure it is something I feel comfortable doing." ❑ "Could we go through each of my treatment options and discuss which might be best for me and my lifestyle?" ❑ "I have been tracking my symptoms using an app. Can we go through some of that data?" ❑ "Are there options in the patient portal or on the virtual care platform to accommodate different languages?" ❑ "Can you recommend any apps that can help me achieve my goal?" ❑ "Can I control who has access to my information in the portal? ❑ Can I make my support system proxy users?"

| At the end of your appointment or after:	
❑ Do I know who I should contact if I need help after my appointment?	❑ "How can I view my care plan after my appointment? Is there an information portal that I will have access to?"
❑ Did I feel comfortable with my provider and do I know how to stay in touch with my provider to maintain our relationship?	❑ "How can I contact my provider to discuss my care plan further?"
	❑ "Is there a platform that I can use to work with my provider after my appointment?"
❑ Are there any other types of technology that I want to have for my healthcare journey?	❑ "Can you recommend guides or other resources that can help my support system (for example, friends or caregivers) with the virtual platform for future appointments?"

Examples Into Practice

1.
Martin has been managing diabetes. They have a virtual appointment with their nurse practitioner, Mr. Singh. Martin wants to work together with Mr. Singh to manage their diabetes. They say:

Hi Mr. Singh. I'm here today to talk about how I've been managing my diabetes. Can we go through my list of questions now?
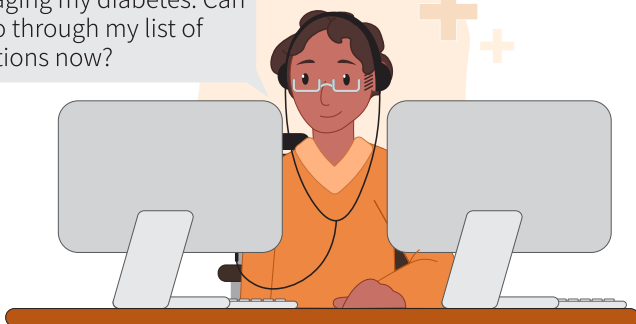

2.
Martin shares their blood sugar readings, and the lifestyle changes they have made since their last appointment.

70 mg/dL
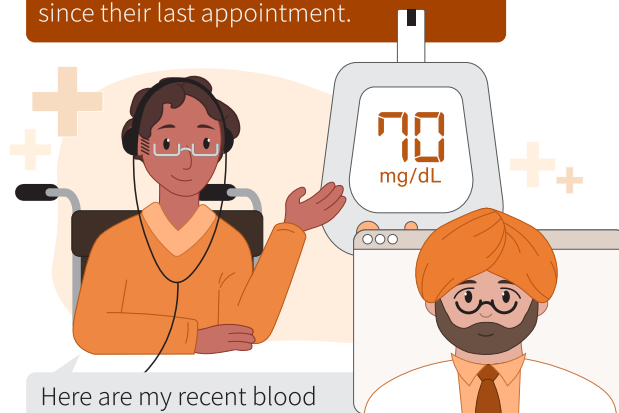
Here are my recent blood sugar readings. I have been trying to get more exercise in my day. How can we create a plan that matches my needs and lifestyle to manage diabetes?


3.
Near the end of the appointment, Martin checks that they agree on their care and next steps. Martin says:

OK, I'll start with the changes we discussed, and I'll track my progress. If I have questions or concerns before the next appointment, what's the best way to contact you?
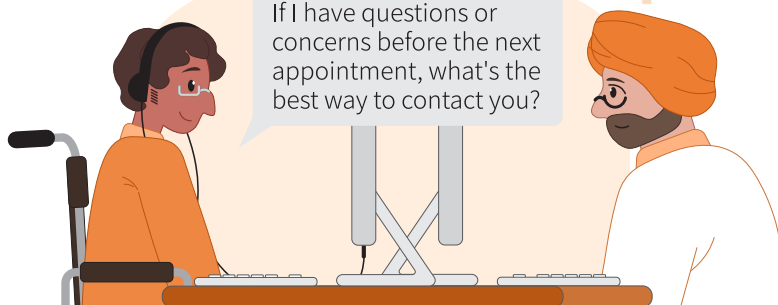
4.
At the end of the appointment, Martin says:

Thank you, Mr. Singh. I appreciate working together on this. I feel confident about the next steps.

Click here to view **helpful resources.**

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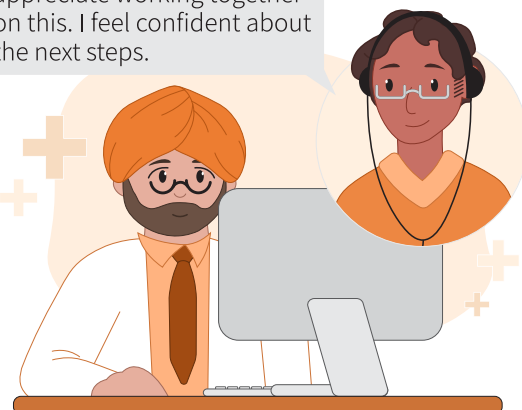
Connecting With Your Personal Care Team

Each person has various healthcare providers, and sometimes those providers have different practices. For example, your family doctor works in a different office from your dentist, eye doctor, or cancer doctor (oncologist). Giving those providers a bigger picture of you is important because it helps them take better care of you. You can help by connecting your different care providers.

Here are some questions to ask yourself and example questions to ask others, including providers and administrative staff:

Personal reflection questions to ask yourself:	Example questions you could ask your provider or clinic admin:
Before your appointment:	
❑ My virtual appointment is with this healthcare provider, but should other providers on my care team join my virtual appointment? Or could they be updated later? ❑ What information should my healthcare providers in my care team have? Will follow ups be sent to my care team? ❑ Are there any test, lab or imaging results I would like to discuss in my appointment? Who should know about the results? ❑ Do I have a phrase or signal to let my care team know I am no longer in a safe or private place for my virtual appointment?	❑ "Can you share the clinical notes to my other providers?" ❑ "Are there any tests, lab or imaging results that I should ask my other provider to share with you?" ❑ "Could you let my other providers know about our signal for when I am no longer in a safe space?" ❑ "Who in my care team has access to my personal health information?"
During your appointment:	
❑ Are all the care providers aware of my current health status, treatment plans, and upcoming procedures? ❑ How can I know if all my care providers are up to date and working toward the same goals? ❑ Do I feel comfortable and safe with all the providers?	❑ "Could you explain my treatment plan and upcoming procedures?" ❑ "Did you review the notes about my last appointment or procedure with others on my care team?" ❑ "How can you help me make sure that my care team gets updated?" ❑ "Will I receive a summary of this appointment?"

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At the end of your appointment or after:	
❏ Will this care provider update the rest of my care team about my latest appointment? ❏ Do I know which care team member I should contact after my appointment? ❏ Do I know who to contact if I am worried, scared or shocked based on the discussion during the appointment? Do I know how to contact them?	❏ "Can you update my other providers about our discussion and my current treatment plan?" ❏ "Based on our discussion today, who on my care team should I contact next?" ❏ "Who should I contact first if I experience this symptom?" ❏ "Can you share my records with my other providers?"

Examples Into Practice

1.

Mariam was diagnosed with stage 2 lung cancer. She wants her care providers to meet with her and her son, Kadeem, so they can all work better together. She is meeting virtually with her oncologist, Dr. Flynn, and her family doctor, Dr. Kennedy.

2.

Before her appointment, Mariam asks her family doctor to join her next virtual oncology appointment. Mariam sends Dr. Kennedy's office the contact information for her oncologist's office to organize this. When the virtual appointment starts, Mariam asks her oncologist:
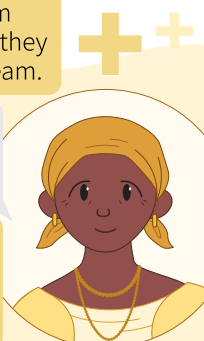
Could you review my treatment plan and upcoming procedures?

3.

Mariam's doctors discuss her treatment plan and procedures. Then Mariam asks her oncologist how they will communicate as a team.
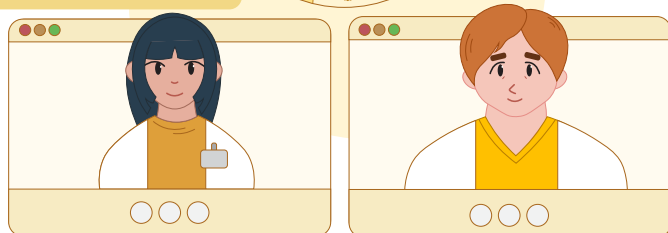
How can we work together to keep us all on track and up to date?

The doctors provide lots of information which leaves Mariam feeling overwhelmed.

At the end of the appointment, Miriam asks her doctors:

Could you connect with my therapist to help me adjust to my treatment plan and changes to my day-to-day life?

4.

After the appointment, Mariam talks with Kadeem about the support she needs to make changes to her lifestyle. She is glad Kadeem was with her and is satisfied with how smoothly her doctors worked with her on her care plan.

Click here to view **helpful resources.**

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Helpful Resources

To learn more click on the links below:

Building a Relationship With Your Healthcare Providers

- [Virtual Visits at UHN](#)
- [Talk with your healthcare team about the future (uhn.ca)](#)
- [Virtual Health Research Group (YouTube)](#)

Communicating What Is Most Important to You

- [Virtual Healthcare Appointment | Arthritis Society Canada](#)
- [Talk with your healthcare team about the future (uhn.ca)](#)
- [Best Practices for Patient Engagement with Telehealth | HMS Postgraduate Education (harvard.edu)](#)

Collaborating With Your Healthcare Providers

- [UHN overview of mobiles apps](#)
- [An Overview of Smartphone Apps (cadth.ca)](#)

Connecting With Your Personal Care Team

- [Signal For Help | Use Signal to Ask for Help | Canadian Women's Foundation](#)

Guide Glossary

Accommodations: any additional arrangements someone needs for support. For example, in an appointment, these could be visual or hearing aids or a translator.

Advocate: to advocate means to support or speak up for someone's needs and goals. An advocate is a person who advocates for someone. For example, you can advocate for yourself, and a friend in your support system could be your advocate if you wish.

Artificial Intelligence (AI): machines or computer systems that can do things that typically require human intelligence. Examples might include understanding language, solving problems and answering common health questions.

Boundaries: limits you set for what you will or will not accept from others to keep yourself safe (for example, both physically and psychologically).

Care plan: a course of action to take that is agreed- upon by you, your healthcare providers and maybe your personal support team.

Care team: the group of all your doctors (for example, family doctor and specialists), nurses, and allied partners involved in your health care.

Compassion: a feeling of concern, understanding and sympathy for others' distress or suffering, and actions to comfort or help.

Digital care: the use of technology in healthcare services (for example, virtual care including video calls and phone calls, remote patient monitoring, digital health apps, patient portals).

Personal Health Information (PHI): information that could be used to identify you such as your name, date of birth, email address or tests results. For more information: https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/04p03

Provider: the healthcare professional who is providing care to you and who is your current point of contact when you are using this guide.

Proxy: a person you choose to act on your behalf. A proxy can do something as if they were you. For example, you can give someone proxy access in your patient portal to view your appointments or test results. This is not the same as a Power of Attorney or Substitute Decision Maker.

Safe space: an environment where someone can be confident they will not be harmed physically or emotionally, through harassment, bullying or discrimination. A safe space can be a physical space or a digital or virtual space. A safe space can apply to an individual or group of people (for example, women or people with a specific health condition).

Support system: your group of people who are or will be involved in your healthcare journey, including advocates, caregivers, friends, families or any trusted individuals.

Technical safety: an understanding of the safe use of digital platforms, the specific privacy and confidentiality policies, and highlighting consent.

Technical support: a place where you can get help navigating digital technology, often through an online chat, email or call.

Credits

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This guide was created by

Patient & Caregiver Advisory
Anne O'Riordan
Brenda Taylor
Kate Hodgson
Michelle Wan

Digital Compassion Research Lab
Bryn Davies
Madison Taylor
Maram Omar
Mary Harasym
Rebecca Charow

Co-Investigators
Nelson Shen
Peter Rossos
Sanjeev Sockalingam

Collaborators
Brian Lo
Lydia Sequeira

CAMH Patient & Family Engagement
Connie Putterman

Principal Investigators
David Wiljer
Gillian Strudwick
Allison Crawford

UHN Patient Experience
Laura Williams

Patient Learning & Experience Centres
Janet Yuen
Lisa Cunningham
Valeria Raivich

Patient Education & Engagement
Amy Zhu
Phyllis Mancini
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Vasiliki Bakas

Patient Partner Program
Alicia Goorbarry

Want to Connect?

If you have any questions, feedback, or want to learn more about our digital compassion projects, please email: David.Wiljer@uhn.ca.