

Helping Boards to Get Engaged

BY RICHARD DELANEY

Richard Delaney of Delaney & Associates Inc. and long-time engagement professional specializing in health care, partnered with the GCE to survey health board members in Ontario as a way of providing a baseline of board engagement activities and current practices.

The survey took place in November, 2015 and while the findings are still being analyzed, early results show there is ample opportunity for hospital boards to better support a more patient-centred culture in hospitals across the province.

The survey indicated that while hospital boards provide strategic oversight to ensure their facility operates in the public interest, when asked if they believe their purpose is to “represent patient and/or family and/or caregiver perspective” an overwhelming 94.4 per cent responded ‘no’.

The survey respondents included 194 hospital directors and 185 community health directors. There was a 67 per cent completion rate. Respondent distribution provides a good sample of what is going on with health boards in Ontario – 17 per cent of respondents represent academic/teaching hospitals, 35 per cent were from community hospitals and 35 per cent were from small hospitals, with 13 per cent from provincial and regional agencies. Of the respondents, 36 per cent represent urban settings whereas 62 per cent of respondents characterized their service area as rural.

There is a serious lack of capacity for board members to engage patients and their communities. Seventy-eight per cent of respondents reported they have had three or fewer days of patient or community engagement training and engagement experience levels for directors is quite low. The good news is, however, that if asked, 49% of directors surveyed would participate or lead patient or community engagement activities without hesitation.



Times have changed since the *Public Hospitals Act* was established over 25 years ago. There is greater emphasis on providing care that is patient-centred. As an example, regulation 188/15 under the *Excellent Care for All Act* places greater accountability on hospitals to deal expeditiously with complaints and for hospitals to engage with patients, families and caregivers in developing systems that monitor and report on those complaints. Patient and community engagement is a proactive and effective way of addressing concerns before they bubble up into time-consuming and potentially expensive complaints. Board members are key to leading the shift towards a more patient-centred culture throughout Ontario health care institutions.

Watch for more detailed findings from the Board Perspectives and Practices in Community Engagement survey in future issues of *Boards*. ■



RICHARD DELANEY is the facilitator for the Community Engagement Imperative for Health Care Boards course offered through the GCE. Please check the education calendar for future dates at www.thegce.ca/education.