

BRIEFING NOTE

Topic: Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment Quality Improvement Plan

Background:

The 18-month well-baby assessment is often the last of a series of scheduled primary care visits prior to school entry. In 2005, the Expert Panel on the 18-Month Well-Baby Visit published a report entitled “Getting it Right at 18 Months ... Making it Right for a Lifetime.” As a result of recommendations made in this report, the focus of the 18-month well-baby assessment was shifted to an enhanced assessment of developmental health and progress. The Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment (EWBA) is recognized as a pivotal point at which to continue the publicly funded immunization schedule, provide children with a thorough assessment of developmental health, and initiate discussions between parents and health care professionals regarding healthy child development, parenting, local community programs and services, and early literacy promotion. By giving every child a complete developmental assessment at 18 months, the EWBA will provide all children in Ontario, regardless of risk or background, with the opportunity to reach their full potential, and will ensure that no child is left behind.

In 2011, the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES) published a preliminary evaluative report entitled “Uptake of the new fee code for Ontario’s enhanced 18-month well baby visit: a preliminary evaluation.” The results of this report demonstrated that as income quintile increased, the proportion of children receiving an EWBA increased. This suggests that lower income children, who are likely to be at a greater risk for developmental concerns, are less likely to receive the EWBA. Therefore, a consideration of health equity is important, and efforts must be made to ensure equitable service delivery of the EWBA in primary health care practices.

Current Situation:

In January 2013, the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) issued a memorandum introducing Quality Improvement Plans (QIP) into the primary health care sector. By April 1st, 2013, Aboriginal Health Access Centres, Community Health Centres, Family Health Teams, and Nurse Practitioner Led Clinics across Ontario were required to submit a QIP to Health Quality Ontario. According to the MOHLTC, QIPs establish a framework to guide primary health care organizations in their quality improvement initiatives, in order to improve the overall quality of services that patients receive.

As a result of enhanced understanding of the link that exists between early child development and children's behaviour, ability to learn, and overall health and well-being throughout life, healthy child development has been increasingly recognized as an important focus of population health strategies and initiatives. In England, the key recommendation made in the 2010 Marmot Review, entitled "Fair Society, Healthy Lives," was to give every child the best start in life. A primary objective of this recommendation is to "reduce inequalities in the early development of physical and emotional health, and cognitive, linguistic, and social skills." This focus on healthy child development is also present in provincial health strategies in Ontario. For example, the number one strategic goal of Ontario's Public Health Sector Strategic Plan is to optimize healthy human development, with a focus on early child development. In addition, the 2011 Ontario Health Status Report identifies healthy child development at school entry as one of twelve key health indicators to be measured and monitored over time.

The EWBA aligns with the focus on healthy child development outlined in population health strategies in Ontario. The purpose of the EWBA is to provide all children in Ontario with a comprehensive developmental assessment at 18 months, in order to allow physical, emotional, cognitive, or speech and language concerns to be identified and addressed earlier. By providing children in Ontario with an equal opportunity to reach their full potential, the EWBA will help to give all children the best start in life.

Recommendations:

Given the alignment of the EWBA with provincial population health strategies, as well as the role of QIPs in advancing the provincial quality agenda and guiding continuous quality improvement practices, it is recommended that all primary health care practices include the EWBA as a core component of QIP initiatives in primary care. The Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Assessment QIP Toolkit has been developed to enable primary health care practices to implement this recommendation.

For more information, please contact:

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