

From quiet conversations to a booming ECHO: the story of building connection and practice support for isolated care providers

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It began with a few conversations about a recognized gap in education, practice support and connection for palliative psychosocial care providers. Social workers, Counsellors and Spiritual Health Practitioners had been feeling discouraged about a lack of opportunities for professional growth and collaboration with others with psychosocial practice focus. After these initial conversations, a province-wide needs assessment was done which confirmed the need for a solution.

From here three organizations partnered to pilot the province's first palliative ECHO®; a community of practice using the internationally recognized model of virtual education to increase competency and connection. The initial pilot, in Jan 2020, had 26 participants, from around the province and a variety of practice settings. Quality improvement methodology was used to continually assess, modify and re-assess the model. The results of the pilot demonstrated improvement in all of the three objectives: palliative care competencies, connection and integration of best practices.

After the pilot a second cohort was established, in Sept 2020, using strategies that built upon the findings from the pilot. The number of participants doubled, while offering increased chance for connection in small groups using emerging leaders and technology. Furthermore, in April 2021, an ECHO started for pediatric health care providers.

Because of the success of these initial palliative ECHOs, a new province-wide Network has been established, in partnership with Pallium Canada. This network will support numerous new palliative ECHO hubs from the stages of needs assessments, ongoing quality improvement and into sustainability.