

## Good relationship management is key to stewardship working environment

**F**ostering good relationships is a vital component to both professional and personal success, explained Dawn Ogram, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate and Direct Services. “Building solid relationships goes beyond our work in the ministry, it is a life skill,” Ogram said.

“Good relationships are crucial when working within the ministry’s stewardship business model which allows us to specialize and focus on what we do best,” Ogram said. “Relationship management involves recognizing and respecting the unique competencies of others and working together to achieve common goals.”

Relationship management is one of 15 stewardship competencies identified by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Competencies are defined, as a core group of skills, knowledge and behaviours that collectively will help employees be successful in their work as the ministry transitions to stewardship. Staff can acquire and improve on their command of these competencies through the Centre for Leadership and Learning and ministry learning and development courses, personal research, mentoring and working within the new business model.

Relationship management entails much more than how one deals with co-workers, it involves a number of components: customer service, partnership building teamwork and concern about the ministry’s reputation both within and outside of government.

Setting and adhering to standards for good customer service is a key piece of relationship management said Adalsteinn Brown, Assistant Deputy Minister, Health System Strategy. “We have to set standards for communicating. For example, I try to answer my own phone calls. I try to make sure my correspondence goes out quickly and that it’s relevant. Everyone in the ministry has a client or customer — whether internal or external. It’s important to really try and live by standards we set for good customer service,” Brown said.

Good relationship management means working

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**Chris Renaud, Chief Information Officer  
Health Services I & IT Cluster**



co-operatively with others to meet mutual goals, looking for opportunities to collaborate, managing conflict and challenges positively, and focusing one’s effort on discovering and meeting the needs of the customer or client — be it the public, colleagues, partners or peers.

“A critical part of actually working with partners is that we start to treat them as true partners and use the value of their skills and knowledge,” Brown said. He noted that a risk adverse environment can discourage staff from talking to others until a project or an idea has advanced quite far. “A large number of potential problems and challenges can be avoided if we exchange and share information throughout the process,” Brown said.

This type of collaborative approach must extend to colleagues across the ministry and government as well as to our health care system partners, Ogram noted.

“It’s important to foster solid relationships with key partners, such as the Ministry of Finance, by building trust and demonstrating that we are accountable,” Ogram said. “To help us be successful in achieving our strategic objectives, we also have to engage, support and earn the respect of our stakeholders.”

Focusing on relationship management is essential because the new structure of the ministry requires staff to work interdependently, said Carrie Hayward, director of the LHIN Liaison Branch.

“For example, meeting the needs of the Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) takes close working relationships and successful teamwork and flexibility to deliver a product effectively. You can’t just say it’s my way or the highway.”

Hayward said she continuously engages the province’s LHINs, as well she regularly interacts with agencies involved with programs that

continue to be overseen by the ministry, such as Cancer Care Ontario, Trillium Gift of Life Network and various community programs. “Good relationship management is about building partnerships through listening, respect, and valuing and sharing information.”

Effective relationship management is also founded on trust, said Chris Renaud, Chief Information Officer, Health Services I & IT Cluster. Over the last 18 months, Renaud said the cluster has focused significant energy in building relationships across the ministry as information technology staff and functions have become centralized.

The cluster set up the Business Consulting and Governance Branch, which is dedicated to building associations with ministry clients and addressing their issues and concerns. “You need to know your clients. You have to understand their business needs and they need to be able to trust that their requirements will be met,” Renaud said.

He said it’s essential that relationship management be viewed as a critical focus, which needs constant attention. “You don’t want to be trying to establish a relationship in the middle of a crisis. You want the relationship to already be in place. It’s what you work at building every day,” Renaud said. ■

### NEW Directions

NEW Directions, published for employees of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care by the Communications and Information Branch, can be read on-line at INFOweb at <http://intra.moh.gov.on.ca/>.

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#### Do you have questions about the organizational change?

- Ask your manager
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For an overall explanation of the ministry’s stewardship competencies, refer to the [MOHLTC Stewardship Competencies Guide](#).

Information on learning and development programs can be found in the [Learning and Development](#) section on INFOweb.