In challenging financial times, how do we fund transformational change?

Imagine for a moment that you have a decades-old clunker of a fridge that has a squeaky fan, leaky cooling unit, and tendency to freeze produce. The fridge is a power hog and it could break down at any moment. It needs to be replaced.

After considering your options, you select a new model that is spacious, well laid out, and will meet all of your food storage needs for many years to come. The new fridge is energy efficient, so the savings in power will immediately begin to save you money, and its excellent temperature control and smart storage compartments will help minimize food waste, also helping your monthly bottom line.

Your problem is you haven’t put any savings aside to buy the fridge, and you don’t want to buy it on credit. You also don’t want to put buying the fridge on hold because of the immediate food quality and cost benefits to you and your family. How will you finance your purchase?

This question is similar to the one that 3sHealth and its health system partners have been asking themselves throughout their transformational change journey. Many of the new healthcare initiatives have a large return on investment—both from a cost and quality point of view—but they require an initial supply of money to get started. In a challenging economic environment, the senior leadership teams have had to explore creative funding options that depart from traditional government funding or borrowing models. That’s where the health system’s innovative, continuous improvement-driven thinking comes in.

Together, the health system’s governors and senior leaders developed the idea of a transformation fund. The idea behind the fund is simple enough: the system will put aside a portion of the savings from shared services initiatives for the next project. When that project comes to fruition, a portion of its savings will again be put aside and applied to the next initiative. In this way, the health system will be less dependent upon other sources of funding to move ahead with important transformational change.

“This fund creates an improvement engine,” explains Kendell Arndt, Vice-president of Strategic Information and Corporate Services at 3sHealth. “The first initiative improves quality and saves money, and the savings the system puts aside generates another initiative. This keeps the momentum going. Some of the savings help to reduce financial pressures for our care delivery organizations, and the rest of the money drives the next initiative.”

The concept, explains Arndt, is to be thoughtful and strategic as we make decisions in healthcare while continuing to generate momentum. By taking this approach, healthcare organizations continue to “think and act as one” in the service of Saskatchewan patients and their families.

“Regions are facing tough budgets and increasing pressures to deliver quality services to patients in the near future. Given that, they have still had the wisdom, foresight and initiative to think long-term. The temptation would be to say ‘No, I need every cent now’. But they haven’t. Instead, they have focused on creating a long-term strategy,” says Arndt.

By collaborating to ensure that the right funding foundation is in place to support innovation, the health system continues to strengthen shared services and drive improvements that will benefit patients and families for years to come.

Kendell Arndt, Vice-president of Strategic Information and Corporate Services
Fresh thinking means timelier, more accurate medical reports

Patients to reap the rewards of a provincially delivered transcription service

Now that templates have been standardized, it is easier for physicians and other healthcare providers to dictate reports. It is also easier for transcriptionists to transcribe those dictations.

No one likes waiting, especially when it comes to getting important test results or other health information back from a family physician or other clinician. No doubt, the quality of care improves when physicians and other clinicians have the right information about their patients at the right time. The reason is simple: good decisions are made based on timely and accurate information.

That’s why the provincial health system is standardizing how dictation and transcription services are delivered in Saskatchewan. Today, each health region has different technologies and processes in place to support this work, which contributes to backlogs, delays, inefficiencies and uneven service provision from one region to the next. But all that is starting to change for the better.

“The system we’re implementing will allow for much faster turnaround times for reports that have been dictated by a physician or other clinician but have not yet been transcribed,” explains Dr. Joy Dobson, Physician Consultant with 3sHealth.

With better technologies to capture both dictations and do the subsequent editing of reports that have been transcribed, “the patient’s medical record will be updated much faster than it is today,” says Dr. Dobson. “This means that when a patient goes to their family doctor following a hospital stay or after a medical procedure, their doctor will have access to all the information related to that hospital stay or procedure in less time.”

This innovative approach, which involves the deployment of new technologies and processes at a provincial level, has already been rolled out to Sun Country and Prairie North Health Regions. And it’s already producing results.

“Our goal for the entire province is to achieve a turnaround time of 24 hours or less for all non-urgent medical reports,” said Lorne Shiplack, Manager of Provincial Transcription Services. “So far in Sun Country, the percentage of reports that are being turned around in 24 hours or less has gone from 18 per cent in February to more than 56 per cent in April. Over that same period, the average turnaround time for all transcribed medical reports in Sun Country is 41 hours, which includes nights and weekends when no transcription work takes place.”

It’s significant that nothing this comprehensive has ever been attempted in transcription services. As regions transition to new provincial technologies, clinicians can easily dictate accurate medical reports and have those reports show up on a patient’s chart much faster than they do today. As well, through a common pool of transcription work, a transcriptionist in one region can complete a dictated report for another region. The result is that as a province, we will be able to level the workload like never before as more regions come on to the service. Even more significant is the positive effect this has on care, as physicians get timelier access to accurate information about care events of patients.
One way to innovate? Standardize!

In a two-day event last February, a team of physicians, transcriptionists, and health information managers from across Saskatchewan streamlined the number of templates that physicians and other healthcare providers use to dictate medical reports using new voice recognition technology. Those reports are then typed up by a medical transcriptionist and incorporated into a patient’s electronic health record.

The number of templates was dramatically reduced from 171 to just 11 – a 94 per cent improvement.

The project team at 3sHealth is working with the technology vendor to incorporate those templates into the new voice recognition software that was procured provincially to support acute care dictation and transcription work – M*Modal’s Fluency for Transcription. That software, which includes the provincial set of acute care templates, was implemented in Sun Country Health Region and is currently being rolled out on a region-by-region basis.

Less is more

“What we know about healthcare is that standardization improves quality of care,” said Dr. Mark Brown, family physician in Moose Jaw and participant in the standardization event. “The last thing you want is for 13 different regions to be working in 13 different ways. And if [as physicians] we can do our reporting very efficiently, it frees us up to provide more direct patient care.”

Dr. Ayaz Ramji, pediatrician in Prince Albert, said that standardization “will make physicians better at dictating.”

“I really enjoyed the [standardization] session,” said Cathy Makie, Director of Health Information Management Services in Regina Qu’Appelle Health Region. “It was a very good mix of physicians, transcriptionists and managers from all the different regions and I think we got to a good place by working together like we did.”

Leslie Sharp, Director of Health Information Services in Sunrise Health Region, who also took part in the event, added that with standardization, “Saskatchewan is on its way to setting a golden standard for improving communication in the care and experience of our patients.”

Other innovative approaches in transcription services include:

- Sourcing new dictation and transcription technologies at a provincial level through a competitive procurement process known as a Request for Strategic Partnership (RFSP), as opposed to the traditional Request for Proposals. In the RFSP, the province was able to signal to the marketplace our intention to find a collaborative partner who would work with us on an ongoing basis to help ensure a successful, long-term transformation. In this case, we’re talking about M*Modal. The company is more than a traditional vendor to us – they really are our strategic partner.

- Collaborating with our system partners (regions and agencies) as well as provider unions to successfully negotiate an agreement that provides for the establishment of a provincial pool of transcription work and enables the distribution of that work across regional boundaries.

- Hiring a physician consultant to engage with the physician community in the province in regard to transcription, as well as other clinical projects being led by 3sHealth.
“Better Together” is at the core of provincial contracting for healthcare

A focus on partnership and collaboration is what makes the shared service approach to provincial contracting unique.

Janine Skolney, the newest member of the 3sHealth provincial contracting team, says it’s been a new experience for her.

“Not only are we working with materials management experts all over the province, the level of engagement with clinical practitioners is new to me,” says Skolney.

Working closely with partners throughout the health system, 3sHealth takes a similar approach with virtually every contract – bringing together clinicians and subject matter experts from the health regions and cancer agency to form a working group or committee – to develop Requests for Proposals and review those proposals. Clinicians throughout the province are often asked to test products from vendors and evaluate them based on criteria the provincial committee has established.

Over the last five years, that collaborative approach to provincial purchasing for Saskatchewan’s health system partners has saved more than $97 million. For Skolney, another unique approach is the use of technology not only to ensure all participants on a new contract have the best information but to reduce the costs of travel and accommodation which would be a result of in-person meetings.

“Instead of just talking to people on the phone about a spreadsheet that may or may not be the same version as yours, we are using WebEx on-line meetings so we can share documents in real time with people all over the province,” says Janine.

Improved patient care, quality, and safety are key focuses in the provincial contracting approach. Since April 2012, the health system has increased provincial purchasing to 60 per cent from a low of 20 per cent. That means that the health system is benefitting from lower rates for 60 per cent of the services, supplies and equipment it purchases. There is improved quality and consistency in products, equipment and services; transparency and consistency in the tendering process; efficiencies in preparing, researching, and tendering contracts; and increased opportunities to purchase the latest technology at affordable prices.

In a recent example, the health regions, cancer agency and 3sHealth negotiated a contract for millions in state-of-the-art SMART IV pumps at no upfront cost. Over the life of the 10-year contract, the health system will pay for the pumps by paying slightly more for the consumables used in those pumps. Even with that increased cost, the health system will save $1 million annually.

The variety of products and services that can be purchased through the provincial contracting includes nutrition and food services; dietary and linen supplies; medical, surgical and laboratory supplies; pharmaceuticals and hearing aids; biomedical waste; and administrative services and supplies.

Often, it’s clinicians who bring forward innovative approaches. When contracts for epidural anesthesia kits were being examined, anesthesiologists, nurses, and other clinicians identified the waste that was being caused by purchasing standard kits that contained items that were never used and discarded. The group was able to develop a vendor Request
for Proposal for custom kits that contained only the items they routinely used. Non-sterile samples from several vendors were obtained and sterile samples were trialled in several health regions before deciding on a vendor that met their specifications. In the end, the clinical advisory group working with 3sHealth was able to eliminate significant waste at a reduced cost.

“The first thing we think about when we look at new contracts is how it will impact the patient,” says Marj Currie, Clinical Advisor at 3sHealth. “Patient safety, ease of use and the ‘human factor’ are things we consider to be as important as the price. But because we are purchasing such large quantities, we are often able to leverage significant savings.”

What happens when a product or service does not meet expectations?

Saskatchewan’s healthcare system purchases and consumes millions of healthcare products each year. In most cases, the syringes, scalpels, latex gloves, and more complex items such as intravenous pumps and heart monitors all work according to expectation. But what happens when they don’t? The failure of medical products to perform can pose a serious threat to patient safety and must be addressed quickly and effectively.

That is the question that a provincial cross-functional team came together to address in the summer and fall of 2015. The team was composed of supply chain, clinical and provincial contracting staff from the health regions, Saskatchewan Cancer Agency and 3sHealth. Their goal was to develop and implement standard work for product issue identification, prioritization and planning, and communication as part of ongoing work to create a consistent provincial process for product issue resolutions.

Resources that have now been developed from this team include:

- Provincial product issue log
- Backorder and product substitution log
- Work standards for using the product issue log
- Training protocol on the new logs, and the use of standard work for the provincial materials management committee and the provincial clinical advisory committee
- Risk-ranking matrices that automatically signal users of any recurring risks that will arise as information is reported on a provincial level
- Standard time periods for resolution by vendors and indicators for when an issue would need to be escalated.

These resources demonstrate how health system partners can collaborate to create innovative solutions to complex problems and be better together.

Are you as healthy as you can be? What does being healthy mean to you?

“Being healthy doesn’t mean you have to run a marathon,” says Alana Shearer-Kleefeld, Manager of Employee Benefits Administration with 3sHealth. “Healthy living can be represented simply by the behaviours you introduce to your life that improve your physical, mental, and spiritual health.

“It can involve spending 30 minutes in your garden every day or taking your dog for a walk around the lake. It can be meditation or yoga or even taking a moment out of your crazy life to relax in the sun with a good book.”

3sHealth, in partnership with Great-West Life, is launching a wellness challenge to encourage more than 42,000 health system employee benefit plan members to take stock of their current health and consider setting some wellness goals. It’s an opportunity for healthcare workers to improve their own health, as well as the health of their families and communities.

From June 1 to August 31, 2016, plan members can work towards their wellness goals and be entered to win fabulous prizes!

Entering is easy:
1. Sign in to Great-West Life GroupNet for Plan Members
2. Go to the Health & Wellness section
3. Complete the Personal Health Risk Assessment

Once entrants have completed the Personal Health Risk Assessment, they can use their personal list of high, moderate and low risk factors to create an action plan to reduce health risks and improve their wellness.

The Better U Challenge Facebook (facebook.com/BetterUChallengeSask) page – you can simply like the page to receive healthy living and wellness tips, healthy recipes and more – will allow participants to share successes and challenges. Participants are invited to use Twitter at #BetterUChallenge to share their stories and connect. Members of the public can also follow us on Facebook or Twitter to access the healthy living tips and stories.

Visit www.3sHealth.ca for full contest details.
A newly minted provincial linen service has already saved Saskatchewan $10 million.

Over the next 10 years, it's expected to save over $98 million, says Mark Anderson, Vice-President of Business Development with 3sHealth.

“We started to implement the service last fall and by February 29, the cancer agency and all the health regions were transitioned,” he said. “It's been a true collaborative effort on the part of all stakeholders but we’re already seeing the benefits, not only in costs but in quality of the linens.”

Most of us think of bedding and hospital gowns or scrubs when we think about linen, but the service also includes cleaning supplies like microfibre mops, he says.

Recently, Anderson said the province dramatically increased its supply of microfibre mops.

“Previously, a mop used to clean one patient room might be re-used in a hospital hallway, or another patient room,” he said. “We now have enough supply to allow our cleaning staff to use a single mop in every patient room, improving infection prevention and control practices.”

The impact of a provincial service is widespread. Now that all the regions have transitioned, other health facilities such as long-term care homes will be brought into the provincial service.

At a recent tour of the K-Bro Linen Systems (K-Bro) plant in Regina, where all provincial healthcare linens are now processed, health region staff involved in the transition got their first glimpse of managing thousands of pounds of hospital laundry every day.

“It was amazing to see the inner workings of the new plant first-hand,” said Shirley Wheeler, Director of Environmental Services for Sun Country Health Region. “I have been part of the transition planning from the very beginning and to see how our linen is being processed now is great. It will allow me to answer questions my staff have about some of the changes we have experienced as a result of the new service.”

The decision to move to a provincial linen service was made in May 2013. Later that year, it was announced that K-Bro was awarded the contract to deliver the service, with 3sHealth administering the contract and leading the project to transition health regions and the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency to the new service.

On April 15, those who lead their organizations through the transition met in Regina to discuss the transition, share the lessons learned, and plan for the work ahead as the project moves to program status. The day ended with a tour of the new K-Bro plant in Regina.

The transition project encompassed change management, using the Saskatchewan Healthcare Management System tools
to identify process changes, stakeholder communications and monthly check-ins with each region and agency. Some facilities incorporated process changes and new inventory early, to make the transition flow easier.

“We worked in partnership with the 3sHealth transition team to prepare for a seamless transition in our region,” says Terry Fjeld, Regional Director Environmental Services at Prince Albert Parkland Health Region. “They helped us identify and work to solve issues ahead of time, like implementing night delivery of carts so the fresh linen is available first thing in the morning and helped us find a solution for temporary storage of soiled linen. The information and support our region received from the 3sHealth team was invaluable.”

As the linen transition project becomes its first new service line, 3sHealth and its linen customers realize there is still much work to do to streamline processes, improve inventory management, and ensure consistent quality. But customers are also finding some immediate improvements. For example, in Prairie North Health Region, the switch from cloth to disposable plastic bags has made a significant difference in worker safety. Aside from improved protection from contagions from the soiled linen, the new bags, which are lighter and hold less, have decreased worker injury from lifting.

“We used to have to use an overhead patient sling to lift the old bags onto the soiled linen carts,” says Michael Lummerding, Manager of Support Services for Kelsey Trail Health Region. “Now our staff can manage the weight of the bags quite easily and we can use the patient lift for patients, not dirty laundry!”

The provincial linen team will now engage region and cancer agency partners to develop provincial standards for infection prevention and control – already improved through introduction of a modern, state-of-the-art laundry facility. They will also work with customers to create a standard linen inventory list for both general linen and surgical linen. Standardizing linen products and work processes will enhance the patient experience, improve worker safety and create efficiencies in the service.

“We have come a long way since this project was announced,” says Jim Crawford, Director of Provincial Linen Service for 3sHealth. “Working in partnership with our health system partners transformed the way we deliver linen by transitioning 13 organizations to one new service. We are looking forward to continuing to work together.”

3sHealth Enhanced Employee Benefits coverage offers plan members new opportunities to improve their health

After recently completing a full review of its existing insurance contracts, 3sHealth Employee Benefits and Great-West Life identified several areas for improvement to ensure the 3sHealth plans are keeping pace with industry standards. These improvements were approved by the 3sHealth Board of Trustees and will be effective July 1, 2016.

“Supporting the health and wellness of our plan members is the goal of the 3sHealth Employee Benefits Plans,” says Bud Anderson, Director of 3sHealth Employee Benefits. “Working together with our union, employer and stakeholder committee members, we have been able to offer enhanced coverage that can make a real difference for our plan members and their families.”

These new enhancements are provided to plan members at no additional cost. 3sHealth assessed the cost of the plan enhancements and determined there is adequate funding to support plan improvements for all union and out-of-scope employees without an increase to contribution rates. For specific information on benefits coverage, plan members can refer to the Members’ Annual Statement and Newsletter mailed at the end of May. Questions about coverage under the 3sHealth Employee Benefit Plans can be directed to a 3sHealth Benefit Services Officer at 1.866.278.2301 or ebp@3shealth.ca, or visit www.3shealth.ca and use the Live Chat option.

Benefit improvements include:

- Increased dependent life insurance for children, a prenatal dependent life insurance benefit, and a reduced premium rate for dependent life insurance
- Elimination of the annual maximum coverage for diabetic supplies
- Elimination of the need for a physician’s referral for paramedical services like massage therapy, physiotherapy, counselling and occupational therapy
- Addition of acupuncture as a covered service
- Increased private duty nursing benefit
- Increased coverage for smoking cessation drugs, including a wider array of drugs being covered
- Increased coverage for therapeutic equipment
- Enhanced coverage for vision care including prescription sunglasses, prescription safety glasses, and laser eye surgery
- Screening for oral cancer
This month, 3sHealth launched a new program aimed at building partnerships within the health sector and giving back to the community. The newly minted 3sHealth Shares program will enable staff to work together in support of a number of causes that enhance the health and wellbeing of Saskatchewan residents.

As a not-for-profit organization, 3sHealth is not in a position to make corporate donations or sponsorships. What distinguishes 3sHealth Shares from many other corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs is that staff members have the opportunity to work together to give of their personal time, skills, and financial resources to support worthy causes. In this way, the program is fuelled at a grassroots level, built by the energy, enthusiasm and generosity of 3sHealth’s staff.

“I am so proud of the culture that has emerged,” said Andrew Will, CEO of 3sHealth. “Our staff care very deeply about their communities, and initiatives such as 3sHealth Shares are just another way that we all live our organizational values. “Through our community support activities and partnerships within the health sector, we really can make healthcare better together.”

The 3sHealth Shares program is not only supported, but also driven, by 3sHealth employees. A committee composed of staff members from across the organization plan and implement the program, making strategic decisions about which causes to support and doing the legwork required to make the events happen. And one doesn’t have to be in a room with the committee members very long to see just how passionate they are about being involved in the program.

“It is very important to me to be involved with the CSR committee because I feel like if we are in a position to help others, it’s the right thing to do,” explained committee member Laura Carleton-Becker.

“Our organization is small, but mighty. We have such caring people, and we have the potential to make a big impact on the community. I know we will do great things, and I am so proud to be a part of it. I keep thinking of how everyone pulled together to support Fort McMurray, and I know we will be able to help a lot more people.”

Upcoming 3sHealth Shares activities include a blood drive for Canadian Blood Services and fundraisers in support of STARS Air Ambulance. All of the activities promise to bring 3sHealth staff together for some fun while supporting worthwhile causes.

“There are so many great healthcare initiatives worthy of support in Saskatchewan, but we wanted to choose some with a provincial focus,” explains Janine Sakatch, 3sHealth Shares committee member and Director of Communications and Stakeholder Relations. “It doesn’t matter where you live in the province, someday you might need blood, or you might need an air ambulance. Our staff members come from all over Saskatchewan, so they know how important these services are to the health and wellbeing of their communities.”