

1ST PAN-AFRICAN CONFERENCE ON TELEMEDICINE AND eHEALTH **COMMUNIQUÉ**

INTRODUCTION

The Society for Telemedicine and eHealth in Nigeria (SFTeHIN), in partnership with Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH), Federal Ministry of Communications (FMOC), New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), National eGovernment Strategies Ltd. (NeGSt), and World Health Organization (WHO) organized the 1st Pan-African Conference on Telemedicine and eHealth, which held from 19th – 20th June 2006 at the Shehu Musa Yar'adua Centre Abuja. Sponsors of the conference included Lagoon Hospitals Lagos and Hygeia Nigeria Ltd (a Health Maintenance Organization).

The President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, H.E. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, represented by the Minister of Health, Professor Eytayo Lambo, declared the conference open. Other dignitaries who made remarks include the Hon. Minister of Communications, Chief Cornelius Adebayo; WHO Country Representative, Dr Belhocine; Senior Special Assistant to the President on NEPAD and Head of NEPAD Nigeria, Chief (Mrs) Chinyere Asika; Treasurer of International Society on Telemedicine and eHealth, Frank Lievens; Executive Vice-Chairman of NeGSt, Dr Olu Agunloye.

Participants were drawn from Federal Ministries and Agencies, major tertiary health institutions and the academia, information and communications technology (ICT) firms, health maintenance organisations, private medical practitioners, development partners and multinationals.

There were scientific sessions, with the delivery of several papers by various experts and telemedicine practitioners from within and outside Nigeria. The international resource persons included Prof Ganapathy (President, Neurological Society of India and Head of Apollo Telemedicine Network Foundation, India); Dr Maria Zolfo, Institute of Tropical Medicine, Antwerp, Belgium (via voice presentation); André Mikolay, President, Promotion Sociale et Développement en Afrique, Republic of Congo; Mr Frank Lievens, Treasurer, International Society for Telemedicine and eHealth (ISfTeH); and Augustine Egbunike MD, Fmr. Medical Director Ramsey Prison Cluster Unit, Rosharon Texas, USA.

The Conference noted as follows:

The Need for Telemedicine and eHealth in Africa

Africa faces huge challenges in achieving the delivery of quality healthcare to the majority of its populace, and in its bid to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Some of these include:

- The Human Resources for Health (HRH) crisis
- Failing health systems and facilities
- Inaccessibility and non-affordability of existing services to the poor and vulnerable masses

Telemedicine and eHealth will serve as a useful means in meeting these challenges and surmounting them.

The Benefits of Telemedicine and eHealth

Participants agreed that the benefits of telemedicine and eHealth include

- the reduction in healthcare costs to individuals, families and the community;
- increased accessibility of hard-to-reach populations to quality healthcare;
- reversal of the “brain drain”;
- improved capacity building for the health workforce; and
- improved efficiency and utilization of scarce resources.

The Feasibility of Telemedicine and eHealth in Africa

During the conference:

- Numerous examples of the successful implementation of telemedicine and eHealth programmes were presented and discussed by participants. These projects exist in settings similar to those in Nigeria and other African countries.
- Recent developments in the health and telecommunications sectors, both globally and locally, have created a favourable milieu for implementing and sustaining such programmes in Nigeria and Africa.

In view of the observations made at the Conference, the following recommendations were made:

- A National Task Group On Telemedicine And eHealth comprising all stakeholders such as SFTeHIN, FMOH, FMOC and the National Communications Commission (NCC), NITDA, NeGSt, NEPAD, National Space Research and Development Agency (NASRDA), etc. should be set up.
- The Committee should, as a matter of urgency, work out modalities for the development of a draft legislation required to successfully implement and sustain telemedicine and eHealth programmes in Nigeria. The Committee will also draw up a framework and an action plan for the implementation of telemedicine in Nigeria.

- Pilot projects should be carried out to prove the feasibility of and reveal immediate challenges to the successful operation of telemedicine and eHealth in Nigeria and other African countries.
- Government should formulate Policies that will create the enabling business environment and provide incentives, so as to encourage existing telemedicine programmes and the development of new ones, particularly in the private sector.
- Resources should be mobilized from various sectors. Government and development partners such as WHO, World Bank, African Development Bank (ADB), etc., would need to drive this process at the initial stage, but the organized private sector and financial institutions must be involved for sustainability.
- Relevant stakeholders, particularly private telecommunications operators that will profit from any telemedicine venture, should be made to fund telemedicine initiatives as a reflection of their corporate social responsibility, as practised in some countries. The creation of a National Telemedicine and eHealth Fund would help in this regard.
- Given the increasingly important role of telemedicine and eHealth in contemporary healthcare delivery, the subject should be introduced in the curriculum of medical schools, to prepare health professionals for practice in the field. In addition, Centres of Excellence where short-course training in telemedicine and eHealth can be conducted should be identified.

CONCLUSION

The next Pan African Conference on Telemedicine and eHealth will come up on 18th – 20th June 2008 at Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Center, Abuja , Nigeria.