Telecommunications Infrastructure Readiness for Practicing Telehealth in Philippine Remote Rural Areas

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Inequitable access to health care

- Lack of health professionals in remote rural areas
- Number of community health centers and district hospitals shutting down...
- Hospitals in countryside incurring vacant plantilla positions for doctors and nurses
Inequitable access to health care

“WHO calls on states to help avert crisis on health workers” (Philippine Daily Inquirer article)

Physically deploying doctors in remote rural areas, a straightforward solution
Inequitable access to health care
Inequitable access to health care

- Migration of health professionals contributes to inequitable access to health care directly...
- ... and indirectly by pre-empting straightforward solution
- Pre-empting health worker migration not humanitarian
Appropriate use of ICT in health

- Out-of-the-box solution
- Telemedicine/Telehealth
  - Health care service delivery over a distance utilizing ICT
- e-Health
  - Telehealth utilizing the Internet specifically
Appropriate use of ICT in health

- Has great potential as supplementary means of delivering expert care to remote communities where health care specialists are unavailable.
- Way of bridging the gap in health care delivery in geographically isolated areas created by the scarcity of health professionals.
- Indirect and more modern approach to addressing the issue of inequitable access to health care.
A study in Quebec, Canada (Ganon, et al., 2007) found that Telehealth could improve physician recruitment and retention.

A health call center was started in Tasmania, Australia to enhance rural physician recruitment and retention by alleviating after-hours demands on them (Lewis and Preqnell, 2006).

Telehealth projected in Australia as an innovative and effective means of uplifting the quality of health of people in remote rural areas (Ellis, 2004).
Health ICT Needs Assessment

- “Telehealth Infrastructure Readiness for Practicing Telehealth in Philippine Remote Rural Areas”
- Paper highlighting the scarcity of ICT resources in remote rural regions which could otherwise be used to improve health care delivery to these areas
- Similar study previously conducted for determining feasibility of using ICT in primary health care work in a country in Western Africa (Bopp, Fuller and Neufeld, 1997)
Health ICT Needs Assessment

- Questionnaire patterned after that used for assessing ICT needs of a farmers’ group in Uganda (Crowder, et al., 2000)
- Respondents are Batch 21 Doctors-to-the-Barrios
- Provides baseline data for pursuing future action in terms of building health ICT capacities in remote rural communities
Health ICT Needs Assessment

- Mobile phone technology have made considerable inroads into remote, rural communities
- Considerable majority has access to PCs
- Smaller majority with digital imaging devices
  - useful in “visual” specialties
Health ICT Needs Assessment

- Much of remote rural areas have no landline telephone infrastructure
- Very few have Internet access
  - online referrals to specialists
Health ICT Needs Assessment

- Majority have referred to another doctor remotely using ICT
- Majority feel government not doing enough to develop health ICT
- Unanimous in wishing for health ICT to be utilized more
Health ICT Needs Assessment

- Australia acknowledges that governments must have the “will and fiscal” objective to put up necessary telecommunications infrastructure in remote rural areas (Hovenga, et al., 1998)

- “National Broadband Network deal is dead” (Philippine Daily Inquirer article)
Health ICT Needs Assessment

- High cost of ICT infrastructure may be mitigated by establishing shared-use ICT facilities
- Community e-Centers may serve this purpose
Special Thanks
For questions and comments....

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