Telemedicine projects range from an e-mail link with a digital image to high-resolution video calls. Telemedicine has been shown to be feasible in low-resource settings (Wootton, 2010) and worldwide systematic reviews in 2001 and 2006 have shown telemedicine projects are frequently evaluated in resource poor settings.

GHDonline’s Health IT community organized an Expert Panel to discuss what has been learned in telemedicine, its benefits, and what existing projects or services are available for organizations and individuals to participate in.

Key points:

- Telemedicine answers clear and important needs of health care professionals by providing continuing medical education, facilitating access to expert advice, and enabling task-shifting and decentralization of diagnostic tools.
- Telemedicine projects are more likely to attain long-term success when institutional anchoring (top-down approach) and routine use by professionals (bottom-up approach) are working simultaneously.
- A multi-lateral approach that promotes South-South collaboration enables more relevant tele-expertise, better adapted to the reality of low resource and isolated settings. It also enables the emergence of innovative processes and tools that leverage existing infrastructure. Centers of excellence in-country can also provide long-term sustainability for telemedicine projects.
- The high cost of Internet connections in low resource settings necessitates developing customized and finely-tuned software, as commercial solutions are rarely designed for these infrastructures.
- There is some concern that the absence of quantitative data regarding health outcomes for telemedicine projects may limit their adoption, as funding may be directed towards interventions which have proven improved outcomes and cost-effectiveness. There has recently been a call to action to address these concerns.
- There are several existing telemedicine networks supporting health workers in resource limited settings:
  - The RAFT network provides educational and training resources from experienced clinicians
  - The Swinen Charitable Trust provides a free, secure web-based messaging system that enables physicians in low resource settings to submit referrals and obtain advice from a panel of more than 500 specialists around the world.
  - CampusMedicus provides a “store and forward” platform for physicians to exchange knowledge, diagnoses, documents and images. It can also be used for live video conferences and to view live video footage from microscopes and other devices.
- Each of these networks requires registration and confirmation that those providing advice are certified health professionals.
- Participants in the panel agree there is a need to connect these existing networks to improve opportunities for collaboration.

Key References


Enrich the GHDonline Knowledge Base

Please consider replying to this discussion with the following information

- Additional examples of telemedicine networks that support health care workers in low resource settings
- Details of telemedicine projects you have been involved in implementing, or used in clinical settings
- Suggestions or systems to facilitate working in a telemedicine project