



The Bahamas



Describe a successful or challenging e-health initiative your country has taken.

In November 2007, Public Hospitals Authority (PHA) in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and Social Development, Department of Public Health (DPH) Commonwealth of The Bahamas, implemented a telemedicine initiative. The initiative is in its pilot phase, which will run for a period of 12 months. The PHA has oversight for the Princess Margaret Hospital while the DPH has oversight for the Marsh Harbour Clinic.

Marsh Harbour is located on the island of Great Abaco in The Bahamas and has a population of 6,000 people, it is located 106 miles north of New Providence and 175 east of Palm Beach, Florida. It is accessible by airplane and boat.

The telemedicine equipment was installed in the Accident and Emergency Department of the Princess Margaret Hospital, Nassau, Bahamas and in the Marsh Harbour Clinic, Abaco, Bahamas. The physician stationed at the Marsh Harbour Clinic, would use the equipment to consult with the Emergency Medicine Consultant (in Nassau, New Providence) in cases of emergencies, particularly those that may require emergency evacuation.

The project Charter outlined the development of protocols and guidelines for use of the equipment, and training provided for medical and nursing staff.

Goal:

- ✦ *To assist in providing universal access to quality health care services to all residents of The Bahamas*

Purpose:

- ✦ *To implement a pilot telemedicine network, related policies, procedures and protocols to provide real-time remote clinical consultation and diagnostic services to rural clinics within the Commonwealth of The Bahamas*

Objective:

- ✦ *To evaluate whether telemedicine is clinically effective and cost efficient in the provision of specialist health-care services to rural communities*
- ✦ *To determine whether the use of real time clinical consultation and use of diagnostics can reduce the need for emergency air evacuations.*

What were the financial challenges and costs associated with the implementation of this programme?

- ✦ *Initial funding for this project was not included in the Ministry of Health's or Public Hospitals Authority 2007 – 2008 budget*
- ✦ *This project was of national interest to the government in its commitment to providing universal access to quality healthcare services to the peoples of The Bahamas. Funds were redirected to assist in the implementation of the pilot project*
- ✦ *Cost for the implementation of the pilot area is estimated at \$125,000*
- ✦ *It should be noted that the pilot was confined to one rural health clinic out of a possible 44 locations situated on 15 different islands.*

What have been the main technological challenges to implementing e-health in your country?

- ✦ *Identification of and availability of suitable equipment to support delivery of e-health*
- ✦ *Placement of cable, insufficient bandwidth, cost effectiveness of using one type of equipment over the other*
- ✦ *Implementation of a network to support delivery of e-health*

- ✦ *Installation of fibre optic cable to support point to point connectivity*
- ✦ *Additional installation of telecommunication lines to facilitate delivery*
- ✦ *Lack of subject matter experts at Marsh Harbour site to install required equipment.*

Have any ethical issues been raised during the design and implementation of e-health programmes?

Ethical issues raised were mainly related to confidentiality, security of patient information and use of information such as photographs for teaching purposes.

Has the implementation of e-health programmes required any legal or regulatory changes?

While there is some legislation relating to the use of ICT, in The Commonwealth of The Bahamas, there are no specific legislation addressing e-health, therefore legislation specific to e-health is being drafted to address the provision of e-health.

What have been the outcomes of your e-health initiatives?

The project is still in its pilot phase, however the following outcomes to date have been noted:

- ✦ *Increased quality of care among patients requiring emergency medical care in the Marsh Harbour Abaco Bahamas area*
- ✦ *Improved collaboration between District Medical Officers in the pilot area and consultant Emergency Medicine Specialists*
- ✦ *Improved pre-hospital management and stabilisation of patients prior to emergency evacuation*
- ✦ *Real time management of patients reducing the need for emergency evacuation*
- ✦ *Speciality paediatric and dermatology being considered for implementation*
- ✦ *Implementing grand rounds and continuing medical education.*

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