Telemedicine

Universal health coverage enabled by eHealth

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The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. The 2030 Agenda is a new plan of action for people, planet and prosperity, with 17 SDGs and 169 associated targets at its core. The 17 Goals cover poverty, hunger, health, education, climate change, gender equality, water, sanitation, energy, environment and social justice. Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is part of this agenda geared to meeting the SDGs. Goal 3 is to “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages” and its target 8 is to “Achieve universal health coverage”, so that all people receive the high-quality health services they need without suffering financial hardship. The goal of UHC is to ensure that all people obtain the health services they need- prevention, promotion, treatment, rehabilitation and palliation - without risk of financial ruin or impoverishment, now and in the future. eHealth was defined by WHO as “eHealth is the cost-effective and secure use of information and communications technologies in support of health and health-related fields, including health-care services, health surveillance, health literature, and health education, knowledge and research. World Health Assembly Resolution, 2005. WHO WHR 2015 stated “It has become increasingly clear that universal health coverage (UHC) cannot be achieved without the support of eHealth.” Variation and abundance of terminology and concepts: Tele, e, m, u, HEALTH. Tele-Medicine, tele-Radiology, etc.; Tele-Health, Tele-homecare, Tele-pharmacy, Tele-Radiology, Tele-Nursing, etc.; eHealth; mHealth (Mobile Health); uHealth (Ubiquitous Health); Informatics (medical, health, public health); Digital health; Information and communication technology (ICT) for health. National health system use ICT to ensure that: Every citizen receive the health services they need; Distance is not a barrier to accessing health service, especially in remote areas; Services are actually provided “free” to people who need; People receive comprehensive health services including prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care; People are aware of the availability of and accessibility to health services; People are happy (satisfied) with the services they receive; A mentoring and evaluation system is in place; OECD findings illustrate the potential benefits that can result from ICT implementation, according to four broad, inter-related categories of Objectives: • Increasing quality of care and efficiency; • Reducing operating costs of clinical services; • Reducing administrative costs; • Enabling entirely new modes of care. Evidence from the WHO World Health Bulletin Special Issue on eHealth assessed the value of eHealth as it improves equity and quality and reduces cost. Telemedicine was defined as “medicine at distance” and more elaborately as the “practice of medical care using interactive audio, visual and data communications; this includes medical care delivery, consultation, diagnosis and treatment, as well as education and the transfer of medical data” Five pillars supported by telemedicine: • Access to information and care; • Knowledge sharing and continuous education; • Public health; • Patient engagement; • Screening and prevention; • eLearning; Case studies in which ICT for health in general, telemedicine and mobile health in particular have contributed to improving equitable access to health information and services.

Conclusion: Seamless integration in national health system and rational use of ICT through a national eHealth strategy and public-private partnership improves equity and enables UHC.

The consultation experience of AVH

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Ain Shams University Virtual Hospital (AVH) provides a comprehensive solution to bridge the gap between high demand for specialized medical services and low number of specialists in the Arab world and the African continent. AVH provides multiple medical services through several portals; social media, website and mobile applications. The social media portal provides health education messages and videos to promote health at all ages and backgrounds. It also has several specialized online clinics as the headache clinic. Consultations are either through messages or audio visual meetings. The service received 4.9 star rating, 100% response rate with average reply time less than an hour. A few patients with misdiagnosis and delayed diagnosis before seeking AVH help were helped by AVH specialists with excellent prognosis. Telemedicine practice is new in the area and faces several challenges but it’s advantages outweigh the problems.