Telemedicine for HIV/AIDS care

Country of origin: Belgium

Health problem addressed

The policy of scaling-up antiretroviral therapy for HIV patients coupled with the increasing availability of generic HIV drugs have been effective in achieving the target of four million HIV patients under treatment in developing countries. However one of the main obstacles to that has been the workforce shortage and lack of training and continuing professional development (CPD).

Solution description

The HIV/AIDS telemedicine referrals are managed through a web site discussion forum (http://telemedicine.itg.be) based on a free, open-source package, which allows registered users to follow and contribute to discussion of referrals, both online and by email.

Functionality

The patient’s history, physical examination, non-identifying pictures, laboratory findings and questions to be answered are posted on the http://telemedicine.itg.be discussion forum, using an electronic format available on the telemedicine website.

Developer’s claims of solution benefits

ITM Telemedicine is one of the very few long-running telemedicine networks delivering humanitarian services to physicians working in resource-limited settings. Telemedicine is a possible way to offer support, mentorship and supervision to physicians working in developing countries. A web-based approach helps to learn from others’ experiences, submitting cases and questions and to be aware of other ways to manage patients.

Future work and challenges

Telemedicine is a powerful educational method. A follow up users’ survey showed that telemedicine advice was valuable in the management of specific cases, and significantly influenced the way that clinicians managed other similar cases subsequently. Despite this success, a trend of decline in use of service has been recognised. Sustaining the interest of users remains a key challenge and further information is required about users’ satisfaction and network performance. In addition, anchoring the service to partner institutions or regional partnerships needs to be explored. Collaboration with larger groups to address these challenges has begun.

User and environment

User: physician (Alumni of the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp).

Settings: rural, urban, home, primary, secondary, tertiary.

Solution specifications

Solution is used to support: Telemedicine

Software/Hardware requirements: Personal computers with access to the Internet.

Standards: DICOM

Currently used in: 42 countries

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