eHealth trends in Pacific Islands 2006

Norio KIMURA[1], Isao NAKAJIMA [1], Muhammad Athar SADIQ [1], Yasumitsu TOMIOKA [1], ,Kenji TANAKA [2], Kiyoshi IGARASHI [2]
1: Tokai University School of Medicine, Japan
2: the National Institute of Information and Communications Technology, Japan

1. Purpose
In the past APAMI 2000 held in Hong Kong, we have reported eHealth trends in Pacific island. In this 2006 APAMI, we also intend to report our study and investigation concerning about their recent activities. Because there are trends to help and support the public health and/or medical care in developing countries, in particularly the Government of Japan, ITU, WHO, UNDP, and other UN organizations. In 2006, around the Pacific, there are three major projects running that covered wide area, while small populations.

2. Investigation
Health professionals in various Pacific Island countries, particularly those working in rural and remote areas, have less opportunity than their peers in developed and even some developing countries to keep abreast with both technical and technological advancements in medicine and healthcare.

POLHN (Pacific Open Learning Health Network)
For their continuing education and professional development, distance education using a variety of media is an option that has been support via funding from the Japanese Government.
In general, POLHN is a successful initiative based on actual web-based operation via internet with package media, like CD-ROM, the evaluation report, and the meeting discussions. The pilot open learning courses are well received by health professionals and the learning centers in each country, equipped with information, communication, technology (ICT) for open learning and health educational resources, are being used by countries for their health professional training and continuing education, including ICT skills trainings. There was a strong interest among the participating countries to contribute to the long-term sustainability of the POLHN and a desire for greater ownership by the countries, of the open learning centers. There was also consensus that it would be important to integrate POLHN as a component of national human resources for health programmes of the ministries of health, and that the network's coverage should be expanded to include other countries and to make it a Pacific regional learning network. There are two phase projects in the POLHN.
Phase One: the establishment of computer laboratories as resource centers for the health professionals (HPs) in ten countries in the Pacific (Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshals, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Samoa, Solomons, Tonga and Vanuatu) has been completed. Computer laboratory equipped with computers, servers, networked printers, data projectors, web cams and Internet connectivity. Various learning and reference materials are also available in the resource centers including the blue trunk library kit.
Phase Two: using the computer laboratories as resource centers for the continuing education of professional health workers of the Pacific started in later 2003.

Pacific Basin Telehealth Initiative

The U.S.-affiliated Pacific Islands jurisdictions represent over 2,200 small volcanic and coral islands stretching across 4,500,000 square miles, with about 400,000 inhabitants living on a landmass smaller than the state of Rhode Island. Due to their geography and isolation, coupled with limited finances, poorly developed infrastructures and lack of skilled staff, these islands provide an ideal environment for developing and implementing telehealth applications.

In 1999, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) launched a multi-year Pacific Basin health initiative to bring telemedicine to the region. This initiative came out of recommendations from two events the previous year: a HRSA-sponsored summit meeting in Rockville, Maryland with the health ministers from the six U.S.-affiliated Pacific Basin jurisdictions and the publication of the Institute of Medicine's report "Pacific Partnerships for Health: Charting a New Course." Both the report and participants at the summit identified telehealth (i.e., telemedicine and distance education) as a key strategy for improving primary care delivery, enhancing prevention activities and supporting the training of health personnel. This telehealthnet work has been funded by the OAT(Office for the Advancement Telehealth) of the U.S. Government.

PPHSN (Pacific Public Health Surveillance Network)

“Training in applied epidemiology and public health surveillance” is one of the five strategies of Pacific Public Health Surveillance Network (PPHSN). It aims to develop a regional pool of experts in public health surveillance and responsefor the Pacific Islands. The PPHSN was created in 1996 under the joint auspices of SPC (South Pacific) and WHO. The Goal is to improve public health surveillance and response in the Pacific Islands in a sustainable way. In 1996, the idea of a modular training programme with field-based components, involving universities,health development agencies and professional associations came up. This programme should be accredited by a training institution. From 1998 to 2001, SPC made a first move in that direction and ran two different series of subregional training sessions in surveillance, outbreak investigation and the use of Epi Info 6 software for surveillance activities. The overall objective of these training sessions was to build a critical mass of health professionals who share a common set of tools and methods for public health surveillance. SPC can also provide attachment and hands-on field training opportunities for trainees in public health practice. A memorandum of understanding was signed between SPC and FSM in 1999. The article suggests the areas of future FSM/SPC collaboration in public health surveillance: the accreditation of SPC courses by FSM; the addition of a microbiology component; the identification of opportunities for field training; and the evaluation and harmonisation of the training programme(s).

3. Considerations and our action

The objectives of our cooperation related Pacific Island through ITU, APT, NICT, Sasakawa Fund, and other private sectors in developed nations is to bring research teams in health care field, governments sectors in island, and other stakeholders in the region to discuss the different applications of telecommunication and information technology in the health care sector. Based on our investigations, we intend to invite some researchers from Pacific Islands to provide an opportunity to study more advanced telehealth at the ITU Telemedicine Expert Training Course in the Shonan Campus, Hiratsuka Japan from 2006 to 2009.

To familiarize themselves with the specifications and implementation details of telehealth;

To assist in the management of the transition process from IPv4 to healthcare specialist to end user(client); and

To share information on the development and deployment of telehealth to other countries and regions.

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