



ALICE2 Case Study

Telehealth: A road which Latin America is determined to pave

Building on the successful Brazilian experience of RUTE –Telemedicine University Network– and thanks to powerful communications and, therefore, the integration made possible by the individual and collective capacities of the National Research and Education Networks

(NREN) and their interconnection through RedCLARA, a new road is opened in Latin America and the Caribbean for the health of their inhabitants, a road where the design of regional protocols of public policies for Telehealth will be the key to success.

The initiative, funded by the IADB (Inter-American Development Bank) and operated over RedCLARA totalled 72 meetings via videoconference only to manage the project on Public Telehealth Policies in Latin America, and six meetings featuring participation of the ministries of health in Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, Uruguay and El Salvador, and its aim is to turn Telehealth into a reality which benefits the more than 577 million inhabitants of Latin America. The relevance of this initiative born within RedCLARA is so fundamental that the ministries of health in Argentina, Costa Rica, Chile, Guatemala, Peru and Venezuela are already processing their incorporation, and PAHO (Pan American Health Organisation) has brought together all the leaders in the field to participate in the discussions that are being conducted with a view to the implementation of its Strategy and Action Plan on e-Health.

“The experiences in RUTE have served to raise awareness about the importance of incorporating the Ministry of Health with the specialists, professors and researchers in the academia and university and teaching hospitals; today they are all connected in Brazil through the Advanced Network for Research and Education, RNP”, indicates Luiz Messina, national coordinator of RUTE and Director of the project on Regional Protocols for Public Telehealth Policies in Latin America and the Caribbean, LAC.

The importance of developing these protocols reflects, in the first place, the need of Ministries of Health and the institutions concerned (health-related universities, hospitals, health research centres, ECLAC, PAHO, WHO) to discuss, describe and disseminate the issues and best practices in Telehealth, so that the various experiences can be discussed and shared, in order to accomplish a shared construction which benefits the region’s inhabitants.

The experiences in RUTE have raised awareness about the importance of incorporating the ministry of health with the specialists, professors and researchers in the academia and the university and teaching hospitals; today they are all connected in Brazil through the Advanced Network for Research and Education, RNP. A similar model has been implemented by the Colombian NREN, RENATA, by connecting 21 health institutions in the country. But this is not all, as today there are several institutions in LAC which are already participating, thanks to RedCLARA’s connectivity, in RUTE’s SIGs (Special Interest Groups), mainly in Teleophthalmology, Child and Teenager Health, Cardiology, Onco-gynaecology, Paediatrics Radiology, Teledermatology, specialisation in Radiology and Diagnosis through images, breast medicine, Telepsychiatry, Patterns for Telemedicine and informatics in Health, Clinical Toxicology and Telecolorectal surgery.

Experiences with online surgery in RUTE

Although there have been experiences of online transmission of some surgeries in RUTE, there still is neither a routine in this field, nor a regular planning. The experiences conducted respond to the vision of surgeons who have understood the efficiency of these transmissions so that students, interns and health practitioners learn about the applicable methodologies. The sessions have been developed through RNP and RedCLARA; the

video is complemented with explanations and slides provided by the surgeons. In order to encourage these experiences, RUTE today works in the development of new software for training and transmission of multiple concurring videos –there are prototypes already-, always with the conviction that if the students' participation is interactive, with full visualisation of all the steps through the videos, it will be problem solving.

In focus

PAHO will participate in the Project on Public Telehealth Policies and in its coordination videoconferences. With 12 countries in the region actively participating through their ministries of health (the six countries to be incorporated are already joined the project's work), PAHO's aim is to take advantage of and encourage the developments obtained. Public Policies on Telehealth are already the focus of discussions in all the ministries of health across the world; Mexico and Brazil transformed such discussions into a National Telehealth Programme, launched in 2002 and 2005, respectively.

“Telehealth initially depends on the digital communication network infrastructure. In this regard, the participation of RedCLARA from the beginning of the articulation for the project's formulation was and is very important for the integration of all the collaborating countries and Ministries of Health. The participation of National Research and Education Networks (NREN) to ensure the advanced connections and the greatest communication speeds in each country”.



Luiz Messina, national coordinator of RUTE and Director of the project for Regional Protocols for Public Policies on Telehealth in LAC.

More information:

RUTE?
<http://rute.rnp.br/>

“RedCLARA guarantees the quality and capacity of communication for the development of the activities planned, since the bandwidth offered by commercial internet is relatively low, with unpredictable results, especially when it is necessary to carry out activities which imply the transport of images, audio, videos and the production of Telehealth applications which demand high quality of the information transmitted and immediate response times”.



Dr. Ramiro López, Telemedicine Coordinator at Ecuador's National Ministry of Health

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