

Scaling Telemedicine with the Virtual Doctors Project in Zambia and Malawi

Submitted by Tyrell Junius (Virtual Doctors) on January 18, 2018 - 6:56am

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Proposal Status: Out of Scope

Executive Summary

For Universal Health Coverage to be achieved, proven digital health solutions must provide evidence of impact to maximize health outcomes. Digital health solutions must benefit the most marginalized communities in order to bridge the gap for access to quality health services. For Zambia, and much of sub-Saharan Africa, there is a major shortage of doctors. With over 16.5 million people, Zambia has less than 2,500 doctors - and whilst two thirds of doctors live in urban/metropolitan areas, over 60% of the population lives in rural Zambia. Rural health centers face challenges in accessing speciality doctors for diagnostic and treatment advice, which Clinical Officers need for cases that are rare, unusual, or need a general second opinion on their diagnosis and treatment approach. This means patients may not always access full diagnostic services needed from their local health professional, which may negatively impact treatment and their subsequent recovery.

When referred from a Rural Health Centre, patients may also have to walk or cycle for many hours, to reach the nearest hospital. Time spent away from their work or land may be financially ruinous and when they get to the hospital the doctor may not be able to help, so the whole process may be disastrous for the patient.

Common ailments include:

- Malaria
- TB
- HIV/AIDS
- Maternity and child health complications
- Infectious diseases
- Dermatology
- Emergency Injuries
- Radiology

Project Description

Accurate diagnoses and early treatment improves a patient's chances of recovery, reducing the need for referrals to hospitals. The Virtual Doctors is a unique service, currently operating in Zambia and Malawi. Its simple system, designed with rural locations in mind, connects remote healthcare workers with a panel of medical doctors who give diagnosis and treatment advice. The Virtual Doctors has a list of more than 80+ specialty doctors who volunteer their time to answer cases sent from the Clinical Officers at their facilities. The service is free at the point of delivery. As a result, patients are diagnosed more quickly and more often treated in their own communities. Reducing the amount of money spent for the patient and the government. Our service improves patient's symptoms, prevents unnecessary referrals to hospitals, and provides eLearning and mentorship to clinical officers.

To date, we have provided consultation on more than 500+ cases while improving our response time to under 24 hours. We operate in 50 health facilities in Zambia, ranging from rural and urban health facilities, and district hospitals. To imagine, can a smartphone application save a life?

The Team

Working together with the **Ministry of Health (MOH) Clinical Care Specialist Team, University Teaching Hospital Telemedicine Center Director**, and locally based SME technology firm **Avencion Group**, under an agreed upon memorandum of understanding, we are enabled to strategically implement our service where need is the highest. The Virtual Doctor Project Manager will lead the organizational

management for the proposal and workplan. He has six (6+) years' experience managing health programs and teams. During a MOH system project, he led a team of 16 health analysts to develop a performance monitoring system for rural and urban health facilities. This impact improved the decision-making capabilities of all levels of care to understand how to allocate HIV/AIDS resources to each facility. The consortium brings together a diverse skill set in the fields of health technology implementation, policy formulation, disease surveillance and project management.

The Virtual Doctors is a charity organization, registered in the UK, Zambia, and Malawi that works with volunteer specialty doctors, application developers, and business managers to ensure the mission and vision of Virtual Doctors is being achieved. Additionally, our board of directors have over 30+ years of International Experience working with multinational companies, NGOs, and funders. We work with district and provincial health office administrators and IT experts to identify clinical officers and health facilities, provide technical backstopping of application maintenance procedures, and monitor effective usage of the Virtual Doctors telemedicine software for continuous improvement of the user experience.

Supporting Documents:  [Overview of the Virtual Doctors Project](#)