

IMPLEMENTATION OF A TELEHEALTH NETWORK IN THE PUBLIC HEALTH SECTOR IN BRAZIL

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This article describes the development and assessment of the Telehealth Network (NUTES) of Pernambuco, a state in the Northeast of Brazil. This network intends to improve the resoluteness of the Family Health Program (FHP), as well as better rationalize the referrals to medium and high complexity levels of health care. Based on a preliminary assessment of the referrals to the Clinical Hospital of the UFPE, a tertiary hospital, four cities were identified to start a pilot project. Five telehealth centers were installed, one in each city and a coordinator Telehealth Center at the UFPE Clinical Hospital (NUTES-HC). Based on cost-beneficial analysis, two telehealth services were chosen to be offered to the telehealth network partners, a videoconference family health continuing education program and a medical second opinion system on the Internet (1). NUTES-HC has a videoconferencing room with capacity of 30 seats, videoconferencing multipoint equipment (Polycom FX), audio-visual devices, solutions to acquire medical images, Internet connection and 2Mbps ISDN (Integrated Service Digital Network) lines. Each NUTES partner has a videoconferencing room with 12 seats and an infra-structure similar to NUTES-HC, but the videoconferencing equipment is point-to-point. The videoconferencing themes and teleconsulting specialist professionals were chosen based on the epidemiology and information process of NUTES partners. Eighty-five videoconferencing sessions was held from August 2003 to December 2005 for the Health Family Continuing Education program. A total of around 2000 attendances those sessions, 29% physicians, 31% nurses, 6% auxiliary nurses, 12% health agents, 21% other health and administrative professionals. Several themes have been presented focusing on Medicine and Nursing; most common areas presented were Pediatrics (30%) and Nursing (20%). From January 2004 to December 2005 evaluation questionnaires were applied to the session's audience. One thousand questionnaires (50%) were collected. Analysis of this survey showed that more than 80% of the opinions classified all categories as "excellent" or "good". Concerning the second opinion system on the Internet, it is still under implementation for the NUTES partners and no formal evaluation has been conducted yet. The NUTES telehealth network enhances the integration between family health professionals and specialists from the referral health centers. The videoconference Family Health Continuing Education Program is well established and is continuously increasing the number of participants. At the moment, an assessment tool based on health indicators is under construction. It intends to produce cost-effectiveness analysis to support new actions to achieve sustainability.

References

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