

Store-and-forward teleophthalmology consultations via email: a cost effective solution for Africa.

Young MJ¹, Thom G², Gundry BN³ and Mars M⁴

Dept of Ophthalmology Nelson R Mandela School of Medicine^{1,3}, Port Shepstone Hospital², Department of TeleHealth, Nelson R Mandela School of Medicine, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

The use of telemedicine for remote consultation is an attractive means of providing medical expertise in remote areas where infrastructure is limited. The provision of appropriate technology can be prohibitively expensive, and the expertise for local support limited in developing countries. We describe our experience with a low cost store-and-forward teleophthalmology system using email to provide remote consultation management advice between Port Shepstone Hospital and the St Aidans Hospital in Durban. Analysis of our cases revealed a dramatic impact of the system on the number of cases requiring physical referral to Durban and a consequently a dramatic saving in cost. The capabilities and limitations of the system are highlighted, and important ethical concerns of teleophthalmology consultations are also suggested.