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AN INITIATIVE TO PROVIDE PRIMARY HEALTH CARE USING TELEMEDICINE

Observations from a
reconnaissance study

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Introduction

- **Background**
 - Scope of interest/involvement
 - Private initiative
- **Primary health care services**
 - Scope and reach
 - Inability to attract doctors to remote rural areas

Scope of our study

- Period
 - 2002-2003
- Activities
 - Visits to a sample of pharmacies
 - Number of other interviews
 - Planned activities
 - Users/patients
 - More stakeholders
 - Legislation/laws

Description of system

- Pharmacy based
 - 60-70 pharmacies
 - Nurse/sister key link
 - Panel of doctors
 - Marketed as “Video doctor”
- System
 - Internet based
 - Dedicated software

Description of system (cont.)

- ▣ Hardware
 - Computer
 - Audio-visual attachments
 - Stethoscope
 - Other
- ▣ Communication link
 - ISDN preferable

Why pharmacies

- Physical infrastructure
 - Presence of health care workers
 - Telephone lines
 - Secure environment
 - Separate room
- In theory not limited to pharmacies

What was different

- Emphasis on primary health care
- Private initiative
- Pharmacy based
- Fee-based

Reasons pharmacies showed interest

- ▣ Able to provide a service with more features
- ▣ Enhanced revenue flow
 - Prescriptions
 - Fee per consultation
 - More people moving through pharmacy
- ▣ Doctors dispensing medicines

Status of system

- Dormant
- Continuation of development of software
- Why are the system not operational?

Problems

- Technical (telephone/ISDN)
- Initial amount of paperwork
- Doctors not always available on-line
- Not enough support from company
- Limited/non-existent marketing campaign among users
- In isolated cases, nursing staff not familiar with system
- Unfamiliarity among potential users

Other underlying reasons

- Opposition from doctors in the vicinity
- Company unable to carry overheads in the initial phase
 - Panel of doctors
- Health Professionals Council

Issues to consider

- ❑ Legislative framework
- ❑ Liability/malpractice
- ❑ Ways to broaden the system
- ❑ Views of patients

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