



Telemed Medical Services: m-Enabled Health Care Delivery

A shortage of health care professionals and insufficient infrastructure continue to impede the Ethiopian government's efforts to provide universal health care. For every 10,000 Ethiopians, there are only three doctors, nurses, and midwives. With 80 percent of Ethiopians residing in rural areas, most live over five kilometers away from the nearest health center. Even with key services offered for free at public facilities, the time and costs of traveling to them, combined with long wait times and stockouts, often deter people from seeking care. Lacking basic health information, many consult with informal health practitioners, or leave conditions untreated.

Barriers to access make detection and successful treatment of diseases like HIV and tuberculosis (TB), which require intensive regimens and patient monitoring, extremely challenging. In 2013, Ethiopia had an estimated 790,000 people living with HIV, as well as 210,000 new cases of TB each year. The HANSHEP Health Enterprise Fund, implemented by the SHOPS project, selected Telemed Medical Services to receive a grant to decrease barriers to health care access and improve care for HIV and TB patients through its innovative mobile phone platform.

The Business Model

Telemed Medical Services is leveraging the proliferation of mobile phones in Ethiopia to tackle key barriers to health care access. Their service, Hello Doctor, is the first and only privately owned, m-enabled health care delivery platform in Ethiopia. Hello Doctor provides users with medical advice and information from trained nurses and doctors over the phone. Users can also request an ambulance or home visit by a health professional, ask about standardized drug information, or find out where the closest health facility that meets their needs is located.

Hello Doctor makes health care more accessible for Ethiopians by having nurses and doctors available by phone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Telemed has health professionals on staff and uses a network of independent providers, who offer medical advice or home care without leaving their regular posts. Hello Doctor reduces financial barriers by eliminating the cost of transport for most patients, and by offering an affordable, per-minute pricing model paid by credit loaded onto patients' mobile phones. Telemed is working to further reduce costs and make the experience of using Hello Doctor better for users by implementing voucher and mobile banking payment options and identifying corporate sponsors.



Dr. Yohans Wodaje Emiru, general manager, inside Telemed's call center.

Jessica Scranton

Grantee at a Glance

- Vision: 3 million provided with timely medical advice and information
- Innovation type: m-Enabled health care delivery that decreases barriers and improves quality of care
- Health focus: Maternal and child health, family planning and reproductive health, HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis
- Target population: Rural residents
- Country: Ethiopia

Telemed lowers social barriers to health care access. The mobile platform is accessible in multiple local languages, and telephone consultations provide callers with anonymity and privacy. People seeking care for stigmatized conditions, such as HIV, can avoid being seen at specialized health clinics. Women and men of any age can discretely inquire about sexual and reproductive health issues without being embarrassed, or even prevented from visiting a clinic. Stigmatized diseases make up a significant portion of Telemed's inquiries, accounting for around 20 percent of calls.

Developing a New Tracking System

The Health Enterprise Fund provides support for Telemed to strengthen and scale Hello Doctor. Telemed is enhancing its call center capacity through server and tracking system improvements, and the training of clinical staff.

With support from the fund, Telemed is also developing a patient tracking system to improve quality of care and treatment outcomes for HIV and TB patients. Using phone and web-based interfaces, health care providers register patients into the system, which then generates automated calls to help providers monitor their patients throughout treatment. Adherence is checked through an interactive voice response system (for example, "if you have taken your medicine today, please dial 1"). The system sends patient progress reports to their providers. Patients and families can check their own treatment regimens, report drug side effects, and receive immediate medical information over the phone. Providers can follow-up on symptoms and drug regimens, offer referrals, and report into national-level disease surveillance systems. Health authorities can then use real-time data for effective, timely decision-making.

The Health Enterprise Fund identified clinical experts to conduct a needs assessment and support Telemed's development of phone-based clinical protocols to improve medical advice. Intensified marketing efforts include publishing and broadcasting educational messages and articles on topics, such as family planning and antenatal care, online and on the radio.

The Impact

“The most common callers are young people, calling about taboo topics like sexual issues and contraception....they want to know, ‘what’s the best contraceptive I should use?’” – Dr. Rania, Product Development Director, Telemed

Telemed has worked closely with the Ethiopian Ministry of Health to ensure that the system aligns with its needs. As a whole, the system will decrease loss-to-follow-up, allow for early detection and management of treatment-related complications, increase the health system's capacity for continuity of care and reporting, and ultimately improve HIV and TB outcomes. Telemed plans to expand the system to track other chronic diseases and conditions with time.

During the first year of the fund's support, Telemed provided over 5,800 people with immediate medical advice through Hello Doctor. Once refined and scaled, the tracking system will improve treatment outcomes in public and private facilities across Ethiopia. Telemed projects that the new tracking system will reach over 5,000 TB patients in its first year of piloting. Across its services, Telemed is poised to reach 3 percent of the population of Ethiopia, or close to 3 million people, in the coming five years.

For more information about the HANSHEP Health Enterprise Fund, contact:

Caroline Quijada, Deputy Director
SHOPS Project
caroline_quijada@abtassoc.com

The Strengthening Health Outcomes through the Private Sector (SHOPS) project is a five-year cooperative agreement (No. GPO-A-00-09-00007-00) funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The project focuses on increasing availability, improving quality, and expanding coverage of essential health products and services in family planning and reproductive health, maternal and child health, HIV and AIDS, and other health areas through the private sector. SHOPS is led by Abt Associates, in collaboration with Banyan Global, Jhpiego, Marie Stopes International, Monitor Group, and O'Hanlon Health Consulting. The views expressed in this material do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States government.

For more information about the SHOPS project, visit: www.shopsproject.org



Abt Associates Inc.
4550 Montgomery Avenue, Suite 800 North
Bethesda, MD 20814 USA
Telephone: 301.347.5000 • Fax: 301.913.6019
www.abtassociates.com