

Novartis Foundation and Ghana Health Service Announce Successful Integration and Scale-up of Telemedicine Program

BASEL, Switzerland, January 16, 2018 /3BL Media/ - Today the Novartis Foundation and Ghana Health Service are announcing the successful integration and scale-up of telemedicine services across Ghana.

The telemedicine service started as a pilot model in the Amansie West District of the Ashanti Region in 2011, covering 30 communities of around 35,000 people. The Novartis Foundation worked with local and international partners to make the pilot a success. Partners included Millennium Promise at Columbia University; the Ghana Ministry of Health, Ministry of Communication, National Health Insurance Agency, and National Ambulance Service; St. Martin's Hospital; MedGate; Ericsson; and Airtel.

Based on the success of this telemedicine model, the Ghana Health Service selected it for implementation across the nation as part of its national e-health strategy to use information and communications technology (ICT) to improve healthcare delivery. Working with the Novartis Foundation on a roadmap for scale-up, the Ghana Health Service and the Ministry of Health have now set up and staffed six teleconsultation centers across the country. Full national coverage of telemedicine services is expected to be possible by 2019.

The telemedicine service uses mobile technology to connect community health workers with specialist health professionals via 24-hour teleconsultation centers. Doctors, nurses and midwives in the teleconsultation centers coach community health workers and advise on the treatment of their patients, particularly in emergency care.

This not only strengthens healthcare capacity and empowers community health workers, it also improves quality of care, avoiding unnecessary referrals and reducing transport times and costs for patients. In 2016, more than half of all teleconsultations could be resolved directly by phone, including 31% that avoided referrals. This is particularly important in rural populations, where access to specialist care is limited.

Telemedicine demonstrates the power of digital health to reduce costs and improve the quality and coverage of healthcare in Ghana. This model can easily be applied to any healthcare challenge, like improving chronic care for noncommunicable diseases or improving mental health consultations.

Dr. Anthony Nsiah-Asare, Director General of Ghana Health Service, said: "We want to make sure that by 2020, everybody can have access to quality affordable healthcare in Ghana, irrespective of where you are. I see telemedicine as the next step on the path to achieving Universal Health Coverage in Ghana."

Crucially, the integration of telemedicine services into national health policy marks a step-change for multisector partnerships bringing impactful programs to scale.

"We're very proud to have been a part of this partnership, all the way from the pilot model to the roadmap for national implementation," said Dr. Ann Aerts, Head of the Novartis Foundation. "Working with policy makers to integrate initiatives like telemedicine into health systems is the ultimate goal for us – only with sustained government leadership can such initiatives continue to transform healthcare for years to come."

Working in partnership and leveraging the power of digital health are at the heart of the Novartis Foundation's work. The Foundation will apply its experience in telemedicine to its other initiatives all over the world.

For more information, please go to: <http://www.novartisfoundation.org/programs/more/408/ghana-telemedicine>

About the Novartis Foundation

The Novartis Foundation is a philanthropic organization which strives to have sustainable impact on the health of low-income communities through a combination of programmatic work, health outcomes research, and its translation into policy to tackle global health challenges. We work hand-in-hand with local and global partners to catalyze sustainable healthcare models to improve access and health outcomes, and to accelerate efforts to eliminate leprosy and malaria by focusing on interventions that aim to interrupt transmission. Everything we do is grounded in evidence and innovation, and our work is a continuous cycle of evaluation, adaptation and application. In 2017, the operational budget for the Foundation was CHF 15 million and our programs reached 7 million people.

For more information, please visit:

www.novartisfoundation.org

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