

Telemedicine with committed nurses can save lives in Rural areas: An Initiative of the Catholic Health Association of India (CHAI)

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India, being a country with a huge population, wherein almost 70% of the population resides in rural areas, does not have an adequate and sound public health infrastructure. The people often struggle to get access to timely medical facilities and treatment. Moreover around 75% of the qualified professionals practice in urban areas. Also the regions of the country are characterized by densely populated communities spread across large distances and lack of qualified professionals in certain areas of health. Lack of proper health care facilities and the absence of an onsite doctors in majority of the areas have contributed heavily towards the increased morbidity and mortality in the rural and remote areas across the country. Recognizing this critical void in the provision of essential health care services, Catholic Health Association of India (CHAI) implemented a telemedicine initiative to strengthen the service delivery from selected health care facilities across India by effectively linking them to expert doctors who will provide off site consultation through effective utilization of telecommunication and information technology . The project focuses on providing healthcare services by healthcare professionals using information and communication technologies for the exchange of valid information for diagnosis, treatment and prevention of disease and injuries in 50 health care institutions in the identified States viz *Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa* for the people of rural and tribal villages. The telemedicine initiative of CHAI focused on (i) capacitating health care institutions on the usage of telemedicine technology, (ii) facilitating information exchange during treatment process between patient and healthcare providers, (iii) standardizing the medical facilities to cater to the poor and the needy and (iv) equipping the health care institutions with technological and administrative set up. During the past one year in 300 working days round 1.5 lakh patients were directly benefited by the tele-consultation facility through 50 centers. In addition, close to 4.2 lakh most deprived and rural people benefitted indirectly through this telemedicine initiative. This paper will focus on the telemedicine initiative undertaken by CHAI and will outline the methodology and outcomes of this initiative. The paper also aims to provide suggestions and future action based on this telemedicine initiative.