

eHealth Readiness and Needs Assessment Framework for Low Resource Communities in Developing Nations

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Abstract and Objective

The study of successes and failures in eHealth initiatives has led to publications on good practices in eHealth implementation. Unfortunately, not many controlled studies able to provide strong evidence have been conducted, especially in developing countries and even less commonly involving underserved communities. Based on the level of evidence currently available in the peer reviewed literature and in previous experience in the field, the authors propose a framework on readiness and needs assessment for underserved communities in developing countries. With the expectation of raising attention of stakeholders to critical factors that need to be analyzed even during the early stages of considering eHealth as a potential solution to minimize health challenges of underserved communities in developing countries.

Keywords:

Telemedicine, Readiness, Needs assessment (MeSH thesaurus) eHealth, Framework, Readiness assessment, Needs assessment, Developing country and underserved communities.

Introduction

eHealth, understood here as the synergy between Information and Communication Technology and Healthcare processes, has been explored as an opportunity to enhance healthcare access to underserved communities in several countries.

Studies have already shown that eHealth is a feasible and safe way of providing care in comparison to conventional healthcare service delivery methods in a variety of clinical conditions.

The shortage and/or misdistribution of healthcare human resources challenge many healthcare systems in the world, including developing nations that, in addition, have to deal with low financial support and the immigration of their workforce to developed countries.

Nevertheless, the mere deployment of technology into communities is not sufficient. eHealth services successfully implemented require a more comprehensive approach including inputs from the local stakeholders and customization to their work processes.

Methods

A peer-reviewed literature search was performed focusing on articles addressing readiness and needs assessment of underserved communities in developing countries. The identified articles were then classified by two reviewers independently and led to the selection of a few matching those criteria.

Authors of this study had previous experience in deploying successful telehealth initiatives in underserved communities and developing countries and have incorporated their knowledge acquired in the field in the proposed framework.

Results

During the development of this Readiness and Needs Assessment Framework four key roles involved in the care delivery through eHealth have been focused: healthcare administration, eHealth coordination, healthcare providers and the population. Explored factors include previous experiences, current services and gaps on the community, prioritized needs, readiness status, expectations and fears toward technology and sustainable modeling appropriate for that environment.

Discussion

The proposed readiness and needs assessment framework intend to bring to attention critical factors for those involved in the chain of events of care delivery using eHealth solutions anticipating it will increase the rates of adequate and successful eHealth initiatives in low resource settings. This Readiness and Needs Assessment Framework will guide the development of a set of survey tools that have been arranged to be validated and applied to underserved communities in a developing country. A full detailed publication will follow the conclusion of this process.

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