

Regulations And Operating Standards For E-Health Services; Lessons From The Medical Concierge Group (TMCG), Uganda.

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Background:

The use of e-health to improve the health of individuals and populations has grown dramatically over the last decade. Advancement has been observed in remotely administered medicine, virtual delivery of medical consultations, remote imaging and medical procedures. E-health systems hold great promise for improving global access to healthcare and informatics, particularly in the developing world. However, most countries still lack fully developed and operational e-health policies, standards and guidelines. We sought to explore the ethical, professional, and legal landscape surrounding e-health in Uganda and share lessons learned.

Methods:

The Medical Concierge Group operates a medical call centre that provides 24/7 access to doctors and pharmacists for medical consultations since 2013. Access is through voice calls, two-way SMS, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, e-mail, and video calls. The Telehealth team continuously searches, reviews and get updated on local and international e-health policies to align the internal e-health policies, standards and operations. This has been through online search, scientific journals, workshops and technical working groups from the Ministry of Health and other partners.

Lessons Learned

Uganda has an e-health policy however this is not fully operational or contextually relevant to e-health products, services and telehealth operations.

TMCG Telehealth practitioners have had to develop internal Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and adopt international telehealth standards. TMCG internal policies include: Clinical management policy, Research policy and SOPs for managing interactions across e-health platforms. International standards include: ISO 9001:2015 and ISO 13131: 2017

Conclusion:

Even without fully developed and operational policies at a national level, e-health programs can still be implemented and benchmarked against international policies and standards. Developing internal SOPs provides critical guidance for the day-to-day activities. More joint

efforts are needed to develop, operationalise and update national e-health policies in order to help standardize e-health quality and guide monitoring and evaluation.

Key words: e-health, ISO, ethics, regulation, legislative environment, malpractice.