

TELEMEDICINE IN TRIPURA : A BRIEF REPORT

Telemedicine, as the term suggests, is the use of telecommunication and information technology to provide diagnosis and clinical healthcare to a patient from distance. Telemedicine is used mostly to connect doctors working with a patient in one location to specialists somewhere else. This is of great benefit to rural or hard to reach populations where specialists aren't readily available.

The Government of West Bengal recognized that in the delivery of health care services, particularly for the remote rural, hilly and semi-urban areas, Telemedicine could play a significant role by way of augmenting and improving the existing public health care systems. The Government has taken initiatives for deploying Telemedicine through execution of few pilot projects in the state Government Hospitals along with indigenous development of the technology.

The implementation of the projects was planned to be undertaken by Webel Electronic Communication Systems Ltd (Webel ECS), a State Enterprise under Dept. of IT & E, Govt. of West Bengal while the technology development activity was planned to be undertaken by Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kharagpur.

Considering its effectiveness, Government of Tripura also showed interest and in the summer of 2004 in a meeting it was decided to connect a few Sub-Divisional Hospitals with two tertiary care centers in Agartala. In Tripura, Sub-Divisional Hospitals were not so well-equipped and they fell in the category of Primary Health Centers (PHC). It was felt that they have more needs than the District Hospitals for availing Telemedicine services. To provide health services in the remote rural areas, Government of Tripura inaugurated the novel healthcare project on 9th June, 2005 that was built over a telecommunication and information technology backbone.

Even after completion of the project period, the State Government proactively arranged funds from the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) for maintenance of the systems and supporting trained manpower to the Telemedicine centers. During this period, software development, support and training were carried out by IIT, Kharagpur. Webel ECS Limited is the implementing agency in executing the deployment of Telemedicine system, creating infrastructure, providing technical personnel at each center for their daily operation and maintenance.

In Tripura, as on date Telemedicine network has been established in 31 hospitals. Every year the number of patients treated through telemedicine is increasing. Initially more than half of the patient referrals were for cases of general medicine. But in recent years, there has been a significant increase in number consultations in radiology and orthopaedics. Over 118654 Patients were treated from June, 2009 up to 31st March, 2018.

For its outstanding contribution in Telemedicine, Webel Electronic Communication Systems Ltd has been honored with the following awards:

- The National Award for e-Governance for the year 2004, by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, Government of India for exemplary implementation of e-Governance initiative on Telemedicine Project in West Bengal under the category 'Outstanding Performance in Service Delivery'
- The Skoch Challenger Award 2005, For the Telemedicine Project.
- eNorth East award – 2013
- The Manthan–American–India Foundation Award 2006 by Government of India under E-Health Category for outstanding performance in the area of Telemedicine.

