



Launch of the Global eHealth Ambassadors Programme (GeHAP)

Rio de Janeiro 11 November 2011

More than 50 people attended the Programme launch, which was hosted by the Federation of Industries of Rio (Firjan) and chaired by its Vice President, Dr Carlos Mariani who warmly welcomed Archbishop Desmond Tutu and spoke of his outstanding work as 'the voice of those without a voice'. He referred to the work undertaken by Centre for Telehealth at the University of Rio de Janeiro at this event, and as a strong ally in addressing the technology that would be needed to achieve better access to clinicians and medical facilities in the future.

Dr Mariani introduced Dr Ana Estela Haddad from the Brazilian Ministry of Health, Dr Regina Ungerer, WHO, Dr Miguel Darcy who was representing President Cardoso who was ill and unable attend, Professor Yunkap Kwankam, Executive Director ISfTeH and Professor Ricky Richardson, Director of GeHAP.

In her presentation, Dr Haddad, the Director of Brazilian Telehealth said that GeHAP addressed the priorities of the government of President Dilma which includes health on the agenda of its central commitment to eradicate poverty.

WHO supported the event and Dr Regina Ungerer, ePORTUGUESe Network Coordinator spoke about the importance of networking and creating opportunities to promote greater equality through the use of technology.

Dr Miguel Darcy conveyed former President Cardoso's regrets to the meeting for his absence. Dr Darcy said that Dr Cardoso considered it fitting that the event was being held in Brazil which was a microcosm of what was happening in exploiting the opportunities opened by technology and the exchange of knowledge to improve healthcare. Dr Cardoso considered eHealth to be a new and promising development and said that, in making the first steps, it was important to share information and experiences. It was clear that GeHAP was offering a powerful tool that would serve as a reference to other areas in the search for freedom, democracy and human dignity.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, chair of the Global eHealth Ambassadors, said that it was a pleasure to be in Brazil and referred to its expanding international role. The Archbishop stressed the importance of 'sharing information and experiences in today's world – without it we shall have nothing. GeHAP's work was crucial and if we don't carry out the commitments, we are in trouble; the world needs it desperately'.

The Ambassadors, Mr Strive Masiyiwa, Dr Rui Vilar (represented by Dr Isabel Mota), Dr Cardoso (represented by Dr Miguel Darcy), Lord Nigel Crisp and Mr Peter Gabriel (both unable to be present) were sworn in by the Archbishop with the following oath:

I solemnly affirm my commitment to the cause of judicious and effective use of information and communication technology for the promotion of health and social justice and the attainment of the

health Millennium Development Goals, locally, regionally and globally, and I promise to honour and promote this ideal through the Global eHealth Ambassadors Programme.

Ambassadors' Keynote Addresses

Dr Isabel Mota, representing Dr Emilio Rui Vilar, said that the Gulbenkian Foundation, which is a global organisation working at both local and regional levels, embraced the spirit of GeHAP and readily accepted the invitation to participate in the Programme as it was recognised that GeHAP possessed qualities at the highest level and would achieve prestigious results through its actions and interventions. She highlighted the fact that Europe was facing issues related to a new group of excluded individuals, i.e. the elderly who faced ageing and loneliness, and considered that eHealth could be a valuable tool in addressing this issue.

Mr Strive Masiyiwa's opening remarks concerned the use of telecommunications in Africa. In 1998, 70% of Africans had never heard a telephone ring; today, 650 million (70%) of Africans own a cell phone and in the next five years this will include internet access. Strive highlighted the fact that many sick people in Africa do not seek medical advice, often until it is too late, simply because they can't afford the fee. The use of a cell phone empowers the patient who can call a clinician earlier and receive advice and treatment at a lower cost. The technology is in our hands, now, at no great cost, as the investment has already been made. GeHAP has the will and must commit itself to this objective.

Lord Nigel Crisp, who was unable to attend because he was in Mumbai on a prior engagement at a telemedicine conference, sent a recorded message. He accepted the invitation to be an Ambassador because he believes that telemedicine is important in the delivery of healthcare, which is about people and eHealth supports people. Lord Crisp spoke about the UK all party parliamentary group in the Houses of Parliament which has been set up to look at global health and his intention to make eHealth a major topic in 2012 which will serve to increase awareness and advocacy in the UK.

Mr Peter Gabriel, also absent on prior business delivered a recorded message which focussed on the use of mobile telephony to deliver better healthcare. Mobile phones are used for moving money around, health education and social activities and in providing healthcare. In one project he was involved with, the mobile phone was used to encourage drug compliance where there was a tendency not to take prescribed medication by offering a reward for the patient who proved that they had taken their medicine. Also, remote diagnosis, which can be done by cell phone, is urgently needed.

Professor Yunkap Kwankam, Executive Director, ISfTeH, gave a presentation 'The Future of eHealth and the Global eHealth Ambassadors Programme'. He expressed the opinion that GeHAP was the most important thing he's done in his life and thanked those who had made it possible. The Gulbenkian Foundation, who provided the initial funding and Microsoft Corporation for its funding and communications facilities. He thanked Firjan for sponsoring the meeting venue and Dr Alexandra Monteiro and her team from the Telemedicine Centre at the University of Rio de Janeiro.

Professor Kwankam spoke about the origins of the Programme and of ISfTeH's role in the international dissemination of knowledge and information across the 60 countries that were members of the Society.

He raised the issue of the future of children in poorer regions of the world, where, for example a child born in the Sub-Saharan region was 20x more likely to die before its 5th birthday than a child born in industrialised countries. Their lives will be greatly affected by access to technology which is no longer a privilege but a basic human right and we must start to leverage the power of communications. GeHAP is a tool which will assist in addressing the major grand challenges in creating a repository of knowledge; an ability to scale eHealth interventions to suit the circumstances and to transform health workers and citizens into eHealth savvy consumers. GeHAP will help to move the provision of services from the catching up process to anticipating and meeting future demands.

Professor Ricky Richardson, Director GeHAP, talked about the aims and objectives of the Programme and the role of Ambassadors.

The Ambassadors, who will serve a three-year term of office, will be recognized and respected opinion formers, globally representative from various walks of life and able to influence health policy. Their Mission is to accelerate the uptake of eHealth methods, processes and solutions to strengthen national healthcare systems and thus improve healthcare outcomes worldwide especially in less advantaged countries. The eHealth Ambassadors will therefore, be expected to:

- Articulate consistent, ethical and evidence-based policy and advocacy positions with regard to the use of ICT in health;
- Promote the development of integrated eHealth systems in countries
- Advocate a higher profile for eHealth in health development activities, country budgets, bi-, and multi-lateral partnerships, aid and development programs.
- Be the voice of those in need

The commitment of individual Ambassadors would be to represent the Global eHealth Programme at one eHealth related event per year and to attend the annual event for health Ambassadors. The anticipated outcomes of the Ambassadors activities include improved access to healthcare information and services, strengthened healthcare services through health achieved by advocacy leading to enhanced wellbeing for all global citizens. Ambassadors will be thoroughly briefed as to the scope of eHealth and the role that eHealth could play in strengthening healthcare systems and thus enhancing and improving healthcare outcomes for those global citizens whose access to quality healthcare services is limited.

Mr Neil Jordan, General Manager, World Wide Health, Microsoft Corporation's presentation, 'Real impact in eHealth' considered that we were at an interesting inflexion point in eHealth and its attempt to tackle healthcare issues. To date, eHealth has been moving along steadily and GeHAP will enable it to gather pace and move more quickly. We have the evidence of possibilities and solutions and political leaders know that they have to embark on health programmes but there appears to be a fear that they will put something in place that doesn't have the impact they had expected. The Global eHealth Ambassadors will help to overcome these fears.

Bill Gates has often said that the world is getting better but not fast enough and not for ever body; Microsoft want to be involved in the Programme to improve the situation.

The Archbishop and senior members of GeHAP were invited to the Governor's Palace to meet representatives of the Secretary of Health and the State University of Rio de Janeiro. Monique Fazzi, Under Secretary-General of Health welcomed the Archbishop and put at his disposal the state government programme to ensure the success of the global network that will bring together experts from around the world with the aim of improving health in developing countries. Brazil is already a country advanced in the use of quality information and the State of Rio has worked with the University in telehealth.