

Indian telemedicine technology transforms patient evaluation & diagnostics: Dr. Sunita Maheshwari

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Indian healthcare has set to tread the path of advanced telemedicine technology. It has begun to interface with smart apps, diagnostic devices and a variety of telehealth devices such as digital stethoscopes among others to ensure the patient and doctor get a more complete disease assessment experience, said Dr. Sunita Maheshwari, president, Telemedicine Society of India - Karnataka Chapter and founder, Teleradiology Solutions.

It is version 2.0 of telemedicine in India. In 2001-2002, ISRO unveiled the concept of telemedicine via satellite. Since a viable revenue model did not emerge, much of these activities came to a grinding halt. "Now, in 2015, we are witnessing the re-emergence of sustainable models and increased government interest. This version of telemedicine is not just audio visual but embedded with advanced technology to offer e-consultation and medical records on the mobile," Dr. Maheshwari told Pharmabiz in an email.

Indian healthcare is valued at \$65 billion but the share of telemedicine is miniscule. Yet there is immense potential to scale-up. In terms of technology application, India has made a positive impact globally. For instance even a company like Teleradiology Solutions led by Dr. Arjun Kalyanpur that served only the US market a decade ago, armed itself with a ministry of health, Singapore accreditation to prove its expertise and reliability worldwide. It also led to many healthcare providers and radiology groups to drive such services from India for Africa and Asian region.

"There is an increasing shift towards cloud computing so that a doctor anywhere in the world could see his patient instead of being confined to a telemedicine room, as was the case in the previous generation of telemedicine solutions," she added.

However, there are several key challenges of poor awareness about telemedicine solutions, besides unreliable infrastructure: power, internet bandwidth and pricing. In fact, telemedicine is the key to rural healthcare but here the price divide is a big barrier. Therefore the government should beef up its infrastructure competencies to provide uninterrupted power to ensure seamless network connectivity. Only if private telemedicine network operators offer this service at government rates then it would obviate shortage of rural healthcare personnel too, noted Dr. Maheshwari.

Another challenge in the space is that not all doctors are tech-savvy and insist on face-to-face interaction with patients. However, with the emergence of smart phone generation of doctors, the concept of offering combination practice where consultation in clinics coexist with dedicated 2-3 hours of remote consultation via telemedicine which is seen to be an efficient workable model, she said.

The leading telemedicine players in India are Apollo (telemedicine), Narayana Health (tele ECG), Teleradiology Solutions (teleradiology) Columbia Asia (teleradiology), World Health Partners (telemedicine).

On September 12, the Telemedicine Society of India (TSMI), Karnataka Chapter is conducting a conclave on 'Impact & Trends in Telemedicine 2015', in association with PeopleHealth India and Teleradiology Solutions. The objective is to create awareness about telemedicine in healthcare delivery and establish the fact that it is not just for regions with limited medical access but is also an important tool to expedite process in developed cities.

