

Telemedicine link to Tibetan settlements

TNN | May 8, 2013, 02.01 AM IST

BANGALORE: Network-major Cisco Systems has won a multi-year engagement with the Central Tibetan Administration to provide telemedicine services to 22 Tibetan settlements situated in remote parts of India. The services will also be available to non-Tibetan communities around the settlements.

The country has over 100,000 Tibetans living in 42 settlements. Most of these settlements are in the remotest parts of the country where there is very limited or no access to doctors and hospitals. Cisco, in association with its healthcare partner in India Telerad RxDx, a Bangalore-based offline and online healthcare provider, is expected to complete the rollout of the project in the next 12 months.

Jeyaseelan Jeyaraj, practice head, healthcare solutions, APAC & emerging markets at Cisco Systems, said a pilot has already been commissioned at Mainpat, a remote Tibetan settlement in Chhattisgarh.

The aim is to take specialized medical care to remote villages where there is no proper healthcare delivery. Cisco will deploy its software platform, Healthpresence, to support video, voice and medical devices, for the project.

Cisco has a huge focus on healthcare in India. The company is already working on telemedicine initiatives for Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh governments and several healthcare providers.

Dr Sunita Maheshwari, founder CEO of Telerad said, "Patients in rural areas are not only getting access to physicians for regular consultations but also to specialists such as pediatric, cardiology and dermatology. Technology is directly touching the lives of millions of people in the country through telemedicine services. It probably is the only tool that will help governments to make healthcare truly inclusive."

Patients go to a telemedicine kiosk where a trained nurse equipped with a digital thermometer, blood pressure cuff,

stethoscope and ECG machine will collect vital information from them. These vitals are viewed real-time by specialist doctors at Telerad centre at Whitefield in Bangalore. Prescriptions will be electronically transferred to the nurse who in turn will print them out for the patient.

Tibetan health minister, Dr Tsering Wangchuk, said, “We are exploring technology in a big way to scale up healthcare services for people in our settlements and non Tibetan communities around them.”

The size of India’s telemedicine market is only around \$10 million now, but the space is expected to grow at a CAGR of 20% in the next five years. Apollo, Narayana Hrudayalaya, Asia Heart foundation, Escorts Heart Institute, Arvind Eye Care, AIIMS Delhi, PGI Chandigarh, SGPGI Lucknow are some of the active providers of telemedicine. These providers cover a population of some 200,000 people a year.

Estimates say some 80% of Indians do not have easy access to healthcare. Rural healthcare is expected to expand at a pace of 44% by 2015, totalling \$8.8 billion, according to a McKinsey study.