

ICT4D REPORT

THE ROLE OF ICTs IN ENHANCING MEDICAL PRACTICE AND CARE

This month's ICT4D report discussed the role of ICT in enhancing medical care and practice.

Making a presentation on the topic, Mr. Amomba Bruno, a specialist in Alternative Medicine at the New Life Clinic and Diagnostic Centre in Tamale mentioned that ICTs are tools that facilitate communication, the processing and transmission of information and the sharing of knowledge by electronic means. These, he said encompasses the full range of electronic digital and analog ICTs, from radio and television to telephones (fixed and mobile), computers, electronic-based media such as digital text and audio-video recording, and the Internet.

He discussed Telemedicine or Health Telemetric as the delivery of health care services, where distance is a critical factor, by health care professionals using information and communication technologies for the exchange of vital information for diagnosis, treatment and prevention of disease and injuries, research and evaluation all in the interest of advancing the health of individuals and their communities. E-health, he said is the use of emerging information and communication technology, especially the Internet, to improve healthcare.

He opined that Information and Communication Technology is important in health delivery because it;

- Enables remote consultation, diagnosis and treatment through telemedicine.
- Facilitate collaboration and cooperation among health workers, including sharing of learning and training approaches.
- Support more effective health research and the dissemination and access to research findings.
- Improve the efficiency of administrative systems in health care facilities.

Mr. Bruno cited instances in Peru, Egypt and Uganda where effective use of ICTs has prevented avoidable maternal deaths. He disclosed that in Cambodia, Rwanda, South Africa and Brazil,

multimedia communication programs are increasing awareness of how to strengthen community responses to HIV and AIDS.

He also recognized the efforts of some NGOs in Ghana like the MOTECH project to assist pregnant women with voice educative information on maternal health in the Upper East region and the recently launch of the Technology for Maternal Health Project by Savana Signatures and Northern Regional Library to assist expectant mothers with information via text messages on maternal health in the Northern region.

Mr. Bruno said, incorporating already existing technology – such as phones or email – into medical practice and routine consultancies can make a difference as no single technology will be suitable for all situations. “Combine old and new ICTs in creative and innovative ways” he said.

He called on the Ghana Health Service to provide the enabling environment for NGOs working in the area of health as it is crucial to providing information and communication services, innovation and entrepreneurship and free flow of information that is needed to enhancing medical practice and medical care. He urged the Ghana Health Service to engage NGOs to provide capacity building in ICT for medical staff in the northern region to enable them to take full advantage of the benefits of ICTs in health delivery.

The Director of Savana Signatures, Mr. John Stephen Agbenyo, used the occasion to inform the participants of the Maternal Health Corner at the Northern Regional and urged them to inform medical practitioners and expectant mothers to visit the library to access the service as it is free to the general public. He also expressed his joy at the recent development in the Tamale Teaching Hospital with the installation of ICT facilities to facilitate health delivery.