

Telemedicine Link

– A First for Uganda

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Recently the Overseas Ultrasound Training Project sponsored by BMUS has been successful in its application to the Swinfen Charitable Trust for a Telemedicine link with Kamuli Hospital in Uganda, one way of maintaining a long term link with the site in an attempt to ensure sustainability and long term capacity building for the individuals now providing the ultrasound service.

As a result I have the fortunate task of visiting Lord Swinfen in a recess room in the House of Lords at Westminster to collect the equipment and receive some training with regard to its installation. For someone with the IT skills of a gnat this could be more complicated for Lord Swinfen than he realises and for me it begs the question "What will I wear?" Anyway needs must and it is my intention to deliver and install this equipment at 2 sites in Uganda during my visit in May.

The Swinfen Charitable Trust was established in 1998 with the aim of helping the poor, sick and disabled in the developing world. It does this by setting up simple Telemedicine links based on e-mail to support practitioners in isolated hospitals in the poorest countries of the developing world. The Trust then puts these practitioners in touch with specialists in the developed world, who donate their time and expertise by providing free advice by e-mail on the diagnosis and management of patients. This store-and-forward still image telemedicine system is based on the British Defence Medical Services' telemedicine system, which has been used worldwide in both military and civilian settings. It uses straightforward email protocols to preserve patient confidentiality and to facilitate the archiving of referrals. The Trust started operating its first telemedicine link in support of the lone orthopaedic surgeon at the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP) in Bangladesh. Based on the success of the Bangladesh project the Trust now operates in centres in Nepal, The Solomon Islands and in Bosnia, to name but a few. A network of specialists in the UK, USA and Australia assists each hospital with free telemedicine advice.



Telemedicine is unlikely to resolve the problems of healthcare delivery in developing countries. It will not help directly with infrastructure problems such as the provision of safe drinking water or sanitation. However, it may help

indirectly, by improving the organization of healthcare. It can certainly help with education of practitioners. It may also help patients; with more complicated ultrasound findings the provision of specialist advice may directly improve the planned clinical care. The usage of the telemedicine link will be audited and the findings published in an attempt to assist in answering the question "Will it work effectively with ultrasound?" and "In terms of global healthcare, is telemedicine actually relevant?"

Specialists Required

BMUS have been asked to nominate specialists who are willing to donate time and provide advice for this ultrasound link. Referrals may come from any of the Swinfen Charitable Trusts sites. Dr David Pilling has kindly offered his services so the field of Obstetrics and Paediatrics has coverage. Further volunteers are required for all other areas of ultrasound usage, I expect the referrals will not be great in number initially so the commitment required is not huge. If you are interested could you contact me via e-mail, stating your specialist area. Many thanks- rosieconlon@supanet.com

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