

Med-e-Tel: a conference very much worth attending

Interested in the brave new world of eHealth? Yunkamp Kwankam flags up an upcoming conference of relevance



I often write about interesting conferences and events that I have recently attended, such as the 36th World Hospital Congress in Rio in November 2009, or the colloquium jointly organised by the International Society for Telemedicine and eHealth (ISfTeH) and the Royal Society of Medicine in London in May this year. At the colloquium, Archbishop Desmond Tutu chaired the inception meeting of the Global eHealth Ambassador Program, about which I wrote in the September issue of *Africa Health*. It occurs to me that it might be even more meaningful to write about upcoming events of significance in the eHealth space.

Big enough but not overwhelming

In this vein there is one conference that merits much attention. Held in Luxembourg every year in April (next year's edition is on 6–8 April 2011) Med-e-Tel (see www.medmetel.eu) is advertised as a business, education, and networking event – and it is precisely that. With 400 to 600 participants from over 50 countries attending the event annually, it is large enough to allow fruitful exchanges and a variety of experiences without being overwhelming. The eHealth capacity building value of the event has recently (2007) been validated and conference participants can now receive continuing medical education (CME) credits that are recognised throughout Europe and in North America.

The conference is an official event of the ISfTeH, which now owns it. The World Health Organization (WHO) has participated in this conference since its inception in 2002. In the 2007 and 2008 editions, in addition to a welcome address at the opening ceremony (along with the Luxembourg Minister of Health) and a keynote address at the first plenary, WHO organised a session on eHealth in developing countries, in collaboration with Study Group 2 of the International Telecommunications Union. A special session on mHealth was also organised in 2007. Med-e-Tel is one of the key areas of the collaboration between WHO and the ISfTeH.

The Med-e-Tel newsletter

While the Med-e-Tel website has served as a portal

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to information on eHealth, the newsletter, which is published four times a year, supplements the passive dissemination effort that the website represents. Key information such as the ISfTeH calendar, the WHO eHealth Intelligence Report (eHIR) are regularly covered in the newsletter. It also welcomes announcements from outside sources who wish to reach the nearly 20 000 recipients of the newsletter.

A key knowledge resource for eHealth

Over its 9-year existence the conference has developed an impressive knowledge repository, with over 1400 abstracts and a similar number of PowerPoint presentations all freely available online. The database is user-friendly allowing searches by year, topic, and country. Med-e-Tel also publishes a print version of these resources under the title, 'Global Telemedicine/eHealth Updates: Knowledge Resources'. Three volumes have thus far been published and can be ordered at <http://www.medetel.eu/index.php?rub=proceedings&page=info>.

Volume 4 will be available in April 2011. If print information is not your thing, you can access Med-e-Tel proceedings for each year from 2006 free of charge at http://www.medetel.eu/download/2006/Med-e-Tel_2006_Proceedings.pdf and http://www.medetel.eu/download/2006/Med-e-Tel_2007_Proceedings.pdf.

A conference within the financial reach of many

Finally, it is worth underscoring the extremely modest registration fee for Med-e-Tel. This is particularly important for participants with limited resources. Participants get all this information, along with many amenities for an affordable registration fee. This has helped the attendance from Africa countries, including official delegations (MoH) from South Africa, DR Congo, and Mali; and from countries outside Africa, such as Armenia, Brazil, Mongolia, and Uzbekistan.

Partnerships are being developed to push the topic of 'developing countries' even higher up on the Med-e-Tel agenda. Key international bodies that have attended Med-e-Tel recently, and who could help move this agenda forward, include the European Commission, the World Bank, ITU, and the Rockefeller Foundation.

I look forward to seeing many of you in Luxembourg in April 2011.