

## The Global eHealth Ambassador Programme kicks off

Yunkap Kwankam on a new initiative to raise the profile of e-Health solutions



Archbishop Desmond Tutu praised a gathering of international clinicians and eHealth specialists in London on May 11 2010 for their vision of a compassionate global health society. The Nobel Peace Prize-winning cleric addressed a meeting of leading healthcare professionals from the UK to kick off the Global eHealth Ambassador Programme (GeHAP), for which he serves as Chair.

He told the audience, 'We have recognised that we are all one global family and in creating inequalities we create tensions and disharmony. You – the people in this room – need not care about the boy who succumbs in Africa, but yet you do. May you infect others with your compassion?' He added, 'It behoves us to create a health system that is accessible, affordable, and ethical. You can't just throw money and people at the problem.'

The Global eHealth Ambassador Programme is an initiative of the International Society for Telemedicine and eHealth (ISfTeH), a federation of national professional societies in 35 countries with institutional members in an additional 25 countries ([www.isfteh.net](http://www.isfteh.net)). Seed funding is from the Rockefeller Foundation.

### Origins of the GeHAP

The Rockefeller Foundation supported the Bellagio Series of high-level meetings on eHealth in Bellagio, Italy during the first 8 months of 2008. This followed several global declarations, notably, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) – Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005) – and the World Health Assembly resolution, Geneva 2005, which have shown the resolve of countries to use information and communication technology (ICT) to improve health. Some 193 countries (member states of the World Health Organization) have committed to using ICT to improve their health systems. This resonates with Target 18 of the Millennium Development Goals that states: *'In cooperation with the private sector make available the benefits of technology, especially information and communications.'*

The Bellagio Series led to the launch of the Bellagio 'Call for Action' on eHealth. One of the specific

recommendations called for the assembly of a number of eHealth Ambassadors to raise the profile of eHealth globally and to articulate the role that eHealth could play in strengthening healthcare systems – especially in the Global South. To support the implementation of the Bellagio 'Call for Action', the Rockefeller Foundation awarded a grant to the ISfTeH.

### The role of eHealth ambassadors

Within the broad framework of using ICT to strengthen health systems, advocacy plays a particularly important role. In addition to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, 12 ambassadors have been identified from among high-profile personalities with global appeal, covering all regions of the world and from various walks of life. The eHealth Ambassadors will therefore, be expected to:

1. articulate consistent, ethical and evidence-based policy and advocacy positions with regard to the use of ICT in health;
2. promote the development of integrated eHealth systems in countries;
3. advocate a higher profile for eHealth in health development activities, country budgets, bi- and multi-lateral partnerships, aid and development programmes.

The ISfTeH will provide scientific and technical support to the programme.

The kick-off meeting was organised by leading eHealth specialists HealthSystems Consultants, on behalf of the ISfTeH, in collaboration with the Royal Society of Medicine. Group Managing Director of HealthSystems Consultants, Charles Lilley, comments, 'We were privileged to organise this event, which brought together some of the world's most celebrated clinicians and advocates of eHealth as a global route to improving quality healthcare access and outcomes.'

I attended the London meeting as ISfTeH Executive Director and co-chair of the event's eHealth Colloquium together with Professor Ricky Richardson, Group Clinical Director for the HealthSystems Group and Vice President of ISfTeH; Professor Richard Kitney of Imperial College, London; Jeremy Nettle of Oracle; Mike McCurry of HealthSystems Consultants; and Tim Schwarz of Sinocare. It was co-chaired by Mr Harvey White, Vice President of the Royal Society of Medicine.

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