

## Strategic planning for eHealth in Sri Lanka

**Prof. Vajira H. W. Dissanayake** MBBS, PhD

Executive Editor, Sri Lanka Journal of Bio-Medical Informatics

E-Mail address: vajirahwd@hotmail.com

Sri Lanka Journal of Bio-Medical Informatics 2013;4(1):1-2

doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4038/sljbm.v4i1.6131>

Modernising health care systems around the world using eHealth to meet today's health care challenges has gathered momentum under the United Nations (UN) Secretary General's "Every Woman Every Child" initiative. This initiative is an unprecedented global movement, spearheaded by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, to mobilize and intensify global action to improve the health of women and children around the world working with leaders from governments, multilateral organisations, the private sector and civil society [<http://www.everywomaneverychild.org>].

The Government of Sri Lanka has made the following commitment to the Every Woman Every Child initiative: "Sri Lanka will empower the health sector through capacity building and leadership in information and communication technology. More specifically, the Government will provide education, training, and assessment to 100,000 members of the work force using a royalty-free open source based technology platform developed by Intel. Sri Lanka will provide training and will certify the 100,000 members of the workforce on information and communication technology by 2015 and also implement a basic electronic health record for children in 5,000 schools that would enable the health sector planners to launch prioritised health programmes by 2015."

Under the umbrella of this global movement, two UN agencies, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) have joined hands to help member states to develop eHealth strategies by publishing a "National eHealth Strategy Toolkit" in 2012<sup>(1)</sup>.

The development of a strategic plan for eHealth in Sri Lanka is vital if we are to move forward with eHealth implementation in the country. A national eHealth Steering Committee (NeHSC) was set up by the Ministry of Health in September 2010. A technical committee working under the NeHSC developed a National eHealth Policy, Strategy and National eHealth Standards and Guidelines. These documents have been subjected to wide consultation among the medical and IT communities, and the first draft was made public through the Ministry of Health website [<http://www.health.gov.lk>] in November 2012. It is hoped that these would be adopted soon.

As we move towards a new era of eHealth in Sri Lanka, understanding strengths and weaknesses in our Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Capacity as well as that of our Health Information System is very important as highlighted in two papers in this issue of the Journal<sup>(2,3)</sup>. At the same time, as Health is a devolved subject under the constitution of Sri Lanka, Provinces have the opportunity to leapfrog in ICT implementation. The North Western Province has taken the first step by formulating an eHealth Strategy for the Province in line with the draft National eHealth Strategy<sup>(4)</sup>. Such initiatives would

accelerate eHealth implementation in Sri Lanka and help the country lead the developing world in eHealth implementation.

## **References**

1. World Health Organisation and International Telecommunication Union. National eHealth Strategy Toolkit. World Health Organisation and International Telecommunication Union. Geneva. 2012.  
[http://www.itu.int/dms\\_pub/itu-d/opb/str/D-STR-E\\_HEALTH.05-2012-PDF-E.pdf](http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/opb/str/D-STR-E_HEALTH.05-2012-PDF-E.pdf)
2. Silva N, Tennakoon V. What makes medical students to say “yes” to e-learning? Sri Lanka Journal of Bio-Medical Informatics 2013;4(1):7-13  
doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4038/sljbm.v4i1.5523>
3. Chandrasekar K, Mahesan S, Bath PA. Notifiable disease surveillance in Sri Lanka and the United Kingdom: a comparative study. Sri Lanka Journal of Bio-Medical Informatics 2013;4(1):14-22  
doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4038/sljbm.v4i1.5190>
4. Wijekoon WMA, Rathnayake RMSK. Strategic planning for management of information and electronic communication in healthcare sector: Story of the North-Western Province. Sri Lanka Journal of Bio-Medical Informatics 2013;4(1):3-6  
doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4038/sljbm.v4i1.5674>