

Reaching the Last Frontier : Video-conference Clinic in Belaga Health Clinic Using the Tele-primary Care[®] System

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ABSTRACT

Introduction	This paper describes how specialist advice from a major hospital is provided to one of the most remote and relatively inaccessible clinics in Sarawak, Malaysia, using videoconferencing.
Methods	Belaga District, in the heart of Borneo, is probably the most remote district in Sarawak. Up until 3 to 4 years ago, it was only accessible by an 8-hour express boat journey from Sibul, the nearest big town. Although Belaga town is now accessible by land (50% are unsealed logging roads built and used by timber companies) from Bintulu, the journey takes 5 hours and transport cost is high. Accessibility to Belaga by river is also subject to weather conditions and the town often gets cut off during the dry season and also during the wet season. All these pose immense challenges to the delivery of health care services to the people of Belaga and greatly reduce their accessibility to even basic health services. Access to specialist services is even more challenging as it is only available in Sibul and Bintulu; and visiting clinics in Belaga are infrequent due to the shortage of specialists and transportation difficulties
Results	Belaga Health Clinic located in Belaga town, is the largest health facility in the district serving a population of 30,000 (5,000 in Belaga Town itself). However, it is only manned by allied health personnel as the doctor post there has not been filled for more than 10 years. The assistant medical officers and nurses are able to manage routine cases. Cases requiring higher levels of care must either be referred to Sibul Hospital or Bintulu Hospital. Emergency cases have to be transported out using helicopters. The Tele-primary Care System: The introduction of the Tele-primary Care [®] System to Belaga Health Clinic helped to overcome some of these logistic obstacles by allowing virtual access to specialists in Sibul Hospital through the internet. Using this system, the Paediatric Department in Sibul Hospital started a video conferencing clinic that allowed patients in Belaga Health Clinic to have face-to-face consultations with Paediatricians in Sibul Hospital.
Conclusions	This paper describes the videoconference clinic between Sibul Hospital and Belaga Clinic, specifically how it is managed, types of cases handled, benefits to patients and constraints faced, by staff, as well as recommendations for the future.