Developing Timor-Leste’s first ever eHealth Strategy

On November 27th, 2014, the first “Consultative Workshop for Development of the National eHealth Strategy” was held at Novo Turismo Hotel, Dili. Government representatives, health professionals and technical specialists, gathered from both public and private sector, to discuss the importance of using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the healthcare sector, also known as eHealth.

EHealth covers a broad range of areas, including health care services, health surveillance, health literature, health education, knowledge and research. EHealth is changing health-care delivery today. It is at the core of responsive health systems. The daily business of health relies on information and communication and, increasingly, on the technologies that enable it, at every level and in every country

Minister of Health, Dr. Sergio Gama Lobo, Spb officially opened the ceremony and expressed his commitment to ensure ‘the delivery of the right information…to the right person …at the right time to enhance health outcomes and improve system efficiency” in Timor-Leste. Dr. Lobo noted that ICT provides opportunities for individuals and healthcare providers to obtain information, communicate with medical professionals, and deliver first-line support especially where distance is a critical factor in order to promote preventive medicine programmes. This would potentially be of enormous benefit to Timor-Leste where the majority of the population lives in rural areas.

Dr. Rajesh Pandav, Acting WHO Representative to Timor-Leste presented the “WHO Regional Strategy for strengthening eHealth in the South-East Asia Region, (2014-2020) during the workshop. Dr Pandav noted that Timor-Leste’s national health information system is currently facing a challenge of fragmented data collection and that the implementation of a well-designed eHealth Strategy can facilitate the provision and improved utilization of high quality health care data.
Intersectoral collaboration is key to the development of the eHealth strategy. The Ministry of Health together with the Ministry of Transport and Communications play essential roles in developing eHealth strategies and services, through strengthening health systems and ICT infrastructure in order to improve health services and outcomes. H.E. Flavio Neves, Vice Minister of Transport and Communications, shared the Government’s plans to improve communications infrastructure in Timor-Leste.

Presentations were also delivered by a number of key stakeholders sharing their needs and visions for the eHealth Strategy, including the Health Management Information System Department and Monitoring and Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Health, Instituto Nacional de Saude, National Statistics Directorate. The first mobile health project launched in Timor-Leste to improve Maternal and Child Health ‘Liga Inan’, was presented by Health Alliance International and Catalpa International demonstrating the successful application of eHealth in the country.

The consultative workshop was the first step in fostering strategic and integrated action at national level, to make the best use of existing capacity while providing a solid foundation for setting a clear direction for the eHealth strategy and outlining the steps needed to achieve longer term goals such as universal access to care, health sector efficiency, reform or more fundamental transformation, investment and innovation.

Based on the outcomes of the consultative workshop, WHO consultant Dr. Anuj Sharma will draft the National eHealth Strategy with prioritized focus areas, along with key activities, responsible entities and timeline, to achieve the expected outcomes. During the workshop, Acting WHO Representative Dr. Rajesh Pandav, affirmed WHO’s continued support to the Ministry of Health to formulate the national eHealth strategy. The workshop was supported by the “EU-WHO Universal Health Coverage Partnership in Timor-Leste 2013-2015; Supporting policy dialogue on national health policies, strategies and plans and universal health coverage” as part of the ongoing assistance from the EU and WHO to strengthen national health systems.