Client Profile

The Government of Romania sought to deliver healthcare efficiently to historically underserved areas of the country. Roughly half the population lives in rural areas. This population, along with remote areas of the country have limited access to health care.

Business Objective

The Ministry of Public Health (MoH), with support from the National Health Insurance House (NHIH), sought a telemedicine strategy to deliver healthcare services to the majority of the population that live in remote and rural areas of Romania.

Two technology foundations would be required:

- eHealth technologies
- Information and Communication Technologies

Project Approach

There were many complex factors that needed to be considered. Digital transformation of any function involves numerous stakeholders, processes and technologies. The delivery of healthcare services is among the most complicated scenarios.

Deliverables

The Ministry of Health requested the following deliverables which they considered vital to the long-term success of the telemedicine initiative.

Roadmap

Providing a roadmap with guiding principles and strategies, to identify and benchmark best of class but cost effective rural and remote health care

Technology Strategy

Developing a technology approach to achieving health care objectives and to planning and implementing advanced eHealth services

Implementation Plan

Creating a mid-term and long-term blueprint for the MoH covered the spectrum of issues.

- Technical including legacy systems
- Operational
- Organizational
- Structural
- Financial
- Regulatory
- Technology's impact on the nation's citizens.
- Metrics and options to evaluate the efficacy of telemedicine

Stakeholders

In addition to the project sponsors, (MoH and NHIH), Actionable Strategies had to consider the needs, capabilities and constraints of the Ministry of Communications and Information Society (MCIS), Special Telecommunications Services (STS) and Ministry of Finance. Healthcare delivery had to be married to information and communication technologies with an attendant transformation of legacy processes.

The initiative incorporated requirements of existing telemedicine partnership projects between the following hospitals into a new integrative telemedicine network:

- Sfantul Ioan Hospital, Bucharest
- University Hospital, Bucharest
- Military Hospital, Bucharest
- Floreasca Emergency Hospital
- Victor Babeş Hospital, Bucharest
- Sfanta Maria Hospital, Bucharest
- Sfantul Spiridon Hospital, Iaşi
- Craiova County Hospital
- Timişoara County Hospital
- Targu Mureş County Hospital

Information Management

Implementation required solutions that provide medical information about patients that provides easy access, while ensuring a high degree of confidentiality. The exchange of medical data about the patient between healthcare professionals ensures their cooperation in the telemedicine solution.

The technical solutions will implement technology network systems for exchanging clinical data in real time. The system will involve all healthcare providers (family practitioners' offices, medical specialists, laboratories, etc.) at a national level, dedicated to the deficit areas in health services, in order to improve outcomes and patient-provider relationships.

Effective information management will reduce duplication of medical services and associated costs. This will improve the quality of healthcare by reducing hospitalization periods and the costs associated with the exchange of medical information, and improving communication between healthcare providers and patients.

For the MoH this approach establishes a roadmap to further develop and implement a range of e-government telemedicine services.

Challenges

The project identified a number of prominent challenges.

- Health authorities' leadership
- Creation of favorable environment for all stakeholders to have common understanding and objectives
- Interoperability of health information systems
- Constant enhancing of the information and communication technologies infrastructure
- Leveraging investments from in-flight initiatives
- Implementation of telemedicine across the nation, since county and regional governments have specific roles, responsibilities, and latitude in decision-making and investments

Knock-on Benefits

In addition to providing better healthcare services across the country, the initiative targeted ancillary benefits.

- Information to citizens and authorities for health education and disease prevention
- Integrated health information networks
- Facilitating synergies and monitoring
- Disseminating best practices
- Benchmarking

Results

The project achieved the Government Of Romania's objectives:

- Improve the efficiency of specialized care in rural areas
- Counter the effects of the decision to close hospitals and turn them into homes for the elderly
- Increase access of the patients from rural areas to the low number of medical specialists in chronic diseases (for example Parkinson's disease, diabetes, hypertension, etc.).
- In addition, the project aligns to the objectives of the EU eHealth Action Plan 2012-2020

Telemedicine implementation is an important part of improving healthcare in Romania. Half of Romania's population lives in rural areas, but nearly all of the country's hospitals are located in urban areas. The EU funded the Romanian government to implement a telemedicine network for people in rural areas. Facing conversion to nursing homes, several rural hospitals instead remained open as a result of this project.