Web Dialogue: ITU-D Study Groups Public Webinar on New E-health Solutions to Combat Pandemics with ICT

PRESENTATION ABSTRACT

Mental Health in the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The world faces an enormous challenge in fighting COVID-19. Behind it all, Intel is committed to accelerating access to technology that can combat the current pandemic and enable scientific discovery that better prepares society for future crises. 5G and Artificial Intelligence are very important for new e-health solutions and already helping for the COVID-19.

WHO defines mental health as "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community".

The outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) put a stress on our mental health. The unpredictability of the situation, the uncertainty of when and how to control the disease and the seriousness of the risk are extremely traumatic. From the other hand, it is commonplace to refer to "Homo sapiens" as "the social animal". Being trapped in a closed space for a long time puts a great deal of pressure on humans as we have has always interacted with one another. This led to the formation of communities and to the formation of the society. Actions that stop the grand flow of the past are unbearable stress for humans. Fortunately, telemedicine can transcend space.

The utilization of information and communication technologies (ICT) for remote mental health support is one of the most interesting areas in contemporary psychology and psychiatry. It is inevitable part of telemedicine/eHealth.

Tele-mental health counselling and therapy offer help to those who need it, no matter where they are and at what time of the day or night this happens. It has proven its potential supporting participants of Arctic expeditions and space missions - both at the Mir space station and in the International Space Station (ISS) as well as during ground-based psychosocial isolation experiments as MARS-500 and Moon experiments.

The wide distribution of COVID-19 and the applied social distance and isolation goes along with an increasing fear and worry about once personal health and of the health of his/her beloved and is often combined with a panic of job loss and financial difficulties. All these cause changes in the sleep or eating patterns; difficulty in concentration; worsening of chronic health problems, including mental health conditions; increased use of alcohol, tobacco, drugs, etc. Mental health problems, relating to COVID-19, have already been observed on a population level, including anxiety-driven panic buying and paranoia about

attending community events. The above, once again underlines the necessity to pay more attention of wide applications of virtual mental health services as they help coping with part of the problems.

It is in line with the strategic goals of Q2/2 to focus, among all other topics, on the following issues:

- Urging ITU members to extend the application of ICT for tele-mental health support of patients, diagnosed with mental health disorders, and border-line cases as well as their family members. Focusing on prophylaxis and prevention of depression will be rather helpful;
- Application of ICT for tele-mental health support of healthy citizens and health service providers during this pandemic;
- Providing tele-mental health services to vulnerable groups of the society – teenagers; citizens living alone, elderly, etc.;
- Application of ICT in mental health area as an educational tool, increasing the qualification of the staff and educating citizens.

The first steps that Q2/2 could undertake may include raising the awareness of healthcare professionals, decision-makers, donors, providing references, good practice models, treatment protocols etc.