



ICT 'promises improved healthcare'

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[NAIROBI] Applying information and communication technology (ICT) to healthcare will result in improved, efficient, quality and timely medical care in the developing world.

This was the conclusion of the Afrihealth 2007 Conference, held last week (18–19 September) in Nairobi, Kenya.

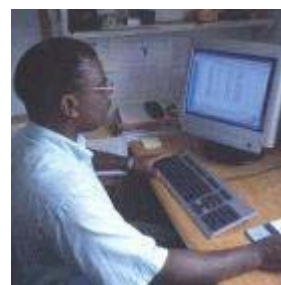
Florence Ngumi, dean of the School of Medicine, University of Nairobi, said "The value of ICT in health is that it will increase access to health information for professionals, teachers, clinicians, health institutions and the general public, which will make health management a lot easier than ever before."

Rajeev Tatkar, of India-based 21st Century Health Management Solutions Pvt Ltd, said electronic medical records present both a challenge and an opportunity for doctors, patients, hospital staff, hospital management, health authorities and research and educational agencies.

Tatkar's company sets up electronic medical recordkeeping systems for health institutions, making medical records available to multiple users where and when they are required, in the form in which the user needs them.

"In India, [electronic medical recordkeeping] has started taking shape in the last six months and has tremendously improved the provision of health services in institutions like the Asian Institute of Gastroenterology, Hyderabad Narayan Hrudayalaya hospital in Bangalore," he told SciDev.Net.

Tatkar perceived encouraging a change of mindset among health professionals as the main challenge to implementing e-healthcare and moving away from paper recordkeeping. He also highlighted the lack of government policies and legal frameworks to promote and implement the technologies.



ICT may benefit African healthcare

In a case study presented at the conference, Adesuwa Akinboro of the African Medical Research Foundation spoke of a pilot e-learning programme organised with the Kenyan Ministry of Health and the Nursing council of Kenya to train nurses in Kenya using computers.

Akinboro said an evaluation of the project, which started in 2005, found that nurses showed improved knowledge, skills and attitudes, as well as better patient care.

Esther Ogara, of the Kenyan health ministry, emphasised that using ICT was particularly crucial in delivering health services to places where patients have to walk long distances to reach health facilities, and there is a shortage of health workers.

She added, however, that there is need to adopt appropriate technology in line with local demands and to take into account local circumstances.