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## **Vloga telemedicine v globalni reformi zdravstva: zdravstvena diplomacija v okviru koncepta Mednarodne virtualne e-bolnišnice**

## **The Role of Telemedicine in the Global Health Care Reform: Health Diplomacy within the Concept of the International Virtual E-Hospital**

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“Health diplomacy is an important and underutilized instrument in our foreign policy toolbox. It can be a powerful playing field for diplomacy - one organized around the possibility of sharing knowledge, tools and other resources to improve global health.”

- Rear Admiral Susan Blumenthal, MD, MPA

“I’ve been known to respond to the calls for boldness; namely today the EU Commission for Science and Technology is launching a new initiative to encourage large scale cooperation between Member States - “Joint Programming” which follows the concept of European Technology Platforms and brings together Member States to develop visions and strategic research agendas on **how to tackle societal challenges in such areas as energy, health and ageing**. These are challenges that go far beyond the scope of any one country to tackle effectively on its own.”

- EU Commissioner for Science and Technology, Janez Potočnik, MS, PhD

### **Abstract**

Health may be a tool of diplomacy, or diplomacy a tool of health. This is becoming increasingly relevant in our shrinking and highly interconnected world in which challenges of global health are also opportunities to do good and to advance diplomacy. The obligation of governments to protect the health of their citizens creates the need for global scientific networks dedicated to curbing the spread of threats to health. Research, science, and technology are often underappreciated tools of health diplomacy that must be used appropriately to achieve diplomatic objectives. Research should not only meet the needs of the investigators but also the priorities of the participant population. As such,

health diplomacy has been widely utilized in building of the healthcare systems with the help of telemedicine and advanced technologies.

Telemedicine, e-Health, and m-Health may be defined as the use of telecommunications and information technology to support the delivery of healthcare at a distance. They represent one of the many legs of information technology and e-health that are responsible for advancing medicine as we know it today. One of the most important elements is application of educational programs and should be an integral part of the telemedicine programs.

Current challenges in health care reform in the US, and globally, are deemed to simultaneously insure the uninsured, increase access to specialty services, and improve quality and patient safety while at the same time reduce costs. Is there a way where telemedicine can help in this process? The answer is affirmative: 1. The Healthcare system can be redesigned with the help of advanced technologies; 2. Telemedicine can help reduce costs; 3. Evidence-based science is essential to prove that these concepts and technologies render healthcare services which are comparable if not better than those received in hospitals and doctors' offices; yet above all 4. Telemedicine can improve access to care so that no patient is left behind, not even those with most challenges; last but not least 5. We have plenty of evidence that telemedicine can deliver quality care.

To be effective, health and development interventions alike must be implemented with an integrated understanding of the existing infrastructure and culture in which they are applied. The BIZCLIR (Business Climate, Legal & Institutional Reform) approach used by USAID has proven to be an effective means for contextualizing intervention to local customs, social dynamics, and policy and regulatory

realities. Another useful approach is called a Megacommunity. This approach is particularly valuable in addressing highly complex problems with multiple interdependencies such as environmental issues, emergency preparedness, development and health. Megacommunities leverage a tri-sector approach which requires participation from the government, commercial and non-profit/civil sectors of society. Traditional public private partnerships are bilateral in nature and often inadequate to address the complexity inherent in certain problems. The Megacommunity approach is not only a useful instrument to solve complex problems in which multiple stakeholders have overlapping interest, it is a useful tool to advance and enhance the health diplomacy needed for building successful and sustainable healthcare systems with fully integrated telemedicine services.

One of the successful examples incorporating all of the above factors is the Telemedicine Network built by the International Virtual e-Hospital (IVEH) in Southeastern Europe. Lessons from the Balkans taught us that diplomacy was essential to reach the governments of the countries. This enabled IVEH to start by organizing seminars where Telemedicine and e-health were introduced to the medical community as well as the administrators. In the process acquiring the support of the political leadership as well as the international telemedicine community was essential. We introduced the "initiate-build-operate-transfer" strategy for building sustainable telemedicine programs in the developing world, and finally transferred the program to the Min. of Health or other local medical authorities. These strategies allowed to prepare the human capacity to independently run the program.

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