

**GLOBAL TELEHEALTH 2015:
INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY AND INFORMATION
FOR BETTER HEALTHCARE**

Studies in Health Technology and Informatics

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Global Telehealth 2015: Integrating Technology and Information for Better Healthcare

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Preface

Global Telehealth 2015 (GT2015) was hosted by COACH: Canada's Health Informatics Association, taking place in Toronto, Canada during May 29–30, 2015. This was the 4th International Conference in the series, which was initiated in 2010 by the Australasian Telehealth Society. The conference series has now matured to the point where it has become an annual event from this year, and a precedent has been set of locating the conference in alternate hemispheres. A total of 25 full length technical papers were accepted for publication in this volume from those originally submitted, as the highest ranked by an international expert reviewer panel of 21 Health Informatics academics and practitioners from 7 countries. We trust this compilation will prove informative and useful in both the Telehealth and wider eHealth domains.

Developments in Telehealth in the recent months and years have demonstrated a growth in adoption, a diversification in service delivery and a broadening of access, all pushing the boundaries of traditional healthcare. The cultural and socio-economic factors are progressively aligning to support successful clinical adoption. Technologies for delivery of Telehealth are increasingly well established and diverse, whether in the form of instantaneous interpersonal communications, or as captured information transmitted for later attention. Workflows and models of care incorporating Telehealth are widely developed and successfully demonstrated in numerous rural, remote and urban healthcare settings around the world.

Additionally, we see some prominent new elements arising in Telehealth today, which offer the potential to further the broadening and integrating of the application of Telehealth. The strongest related trend is the growth of Mobile Health (mHealth), with pervasive access to information and communication services now achievable through personal devices such as tablet computers and smartphones. Closely related is the explosion in the personal and home health monitoring market, enabling the monitoring and tracking of individuals to achieve a “quantified self”, providing value added and enriched datastreams for preventive health and chronic disease management.

Another interesting trend impacting on the future of Telehealth is the emergence of “virtual healthcare” services, using online interactive environments to engage with the subject of care which remotely enable or mimic the desired patient-clinician direct relationship. These can be variously provided by virtual clinics, by anonymous interactions or by agents such as dialogue engines or avatars. In areas where patient personal sensitivity may compromise access to conventional care, such as mental health or youth social issues, provision of these types of services via health portals is increasingly gaining traction.

These new and integrated realms of mobile, personal and virtual are opening up the Telehealth worlds, to serve the patient's health and care while ensuring the evidence of clinical benefits and business efficiencies are well established. The factors that support such adoption in our countries, the technologies that are at the cutting edge and the use of Telehealth to extend the reach of health care, collectively reinforce the Global Telehealth 2015 theme of “Serving the Underserved: Integrating Technology & Information for Better Healthcare.” Our global healthcare community, through the leadership and knowledge reflected in these papers, will benefit in the equity of access and

uniform provision of healthcare services and influence health policy and strategy decisions worldwide.

Telehealth, in the integrated and broad sense identified above, will continue to contribute directly and comprehensively towards achieving these ideals. In settings where very diverse demographics and population distribution occur, Telehealth has played a leading role in addressing such needs, and the GT2015 host country Canada provides numerous benchmark examples of how such goals can be attained. On behalf of COACH and our Canadian Telehealth Forum we hope that the knowledge shared at GT2015 and this Canadian and international leading thinking will further the discussions and collaboration and lead to breakthroughs in serving the underserved and integrating technology and information for better healthcare.

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