

REPORT ON THE USE OF ICTS IN MANGING PATIENTS' DATA FOR EFFECTIVE HEALTH DELIVERY SYSTEM IN GHANA



The Ghana ICT for Accelerated Development (ICT4AD) Policy which represents the Vision for Ghana in the information age has as its overall objective to engineer an ICT-led socio-economic development process with the potential to transform Ghana into a middle income, information-rich, knowledge-based and technology driven economy and society. The

Strategic Focus of the Policy is to simultaneously target the development of the ICT sector and industry as well as use ICTs as a broad-based enabler of developmental goals, with emphasis on the development, deployment and exploitation of ICTs to aid the development of all other sectors of the economy. Despite the fact that this ICT4D policy has been in place over the years, very little has been achieved in terms of mainstreaming ICTs fully into the health sector of the country especially the areas of using ICT tools to manage records of patients'. It was to create the awareness about the enormous benefits that the country will derive if she fully integrates ICT into the health delivery system of Ghana that the Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS) organised a one day forum on the use of ICTS in managing patients' data for effective health delivery system in Ghana. The seminar drew participants from health institutions such as the Tamale Teaching Hospital, Tamale West Hospital, Tamale Central Hospital, National Health Insurance Authority and scheme, Tamale SDA Hospital, Births and Death Registry, St. Lucy Poly-Clinic and people from the general public. Welcoming the participants, Mr. Raphael Adomey M- the capacity Building officer of Savana Signatures- said that since the wealth of a nation depends on the health of its populace, the forum was geared at bringing key stakeholders to brainstorm on the situation so far and to draw a road map that will help the country achieve its ICT4D policy goals.

Mr. John Stephen Agbenyo, the Director of Savana Signatures in making his presentation said Information Technology is now holding sway over countries and all aspects of service delivery systems and the Ghana health Service is not an exception. In spite of the fast rate at which ICTs are been use to improve upon and facilitate quality health delivery, Stephen bemoaned that the Ghana health Service is still lacking in effectively managing the data of patients and thus the purpose of the forum to examine the success so far and the challenges as well as the way forward. The one day knowledge sharing session was organised under the auspices of the Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS). GINKS is a constitution of a broad range of people drawn from various fields of endeavour but mainly involved in Information

Communication Technologies (ICTs) and sustainable Development. GINKS has a GINKS vision is to have a network of individuals and organizations sharing Information and Knowledge that puts ICT resources within the reach of all. Stephen further explained that the key activities of GINKS include Knowledge Sharing, research, capacity Building as well as lobbying and advocacy. Savana Signatures (SavSign) which is the regional partner for GINKS, is a registered Charity, Non-Governmental Organization that has developed keen interest in the empowerment of youth and women through the use of ICTs and has a mission of promoting the development of youth and women through education and knowledge sharing. The thematic areas of Savsign include mainstreaming ICTs into Education ICTs and gender, youth entrepreneurial skills development Knowledge Sharing, Institutional ICT Capacity building and development Research on ICTs for development.

Making the first presentation on the topic Mr. Hassan Hamadu, the regional ICT coordinator for the National Health Insurance Authority of the Upper East region said that The Ghana ICT for Accelerated Development (Ict4ad) Policy Hinges On The Following 14 Pillars with key focus on Accelerated Human Resource Development, Rapid ICT and Enabling Physical Infrastructure Development. The key objectives of the ICT4D are to improve the health status of the population while focusing efforts on reducing inequalities in health, to promote the implementation of telemedicine applications within the Health Delivery System, to integrate and deploy ICTs in health program delivery with targets for health education, training and preventive detection and to utilize ICTs as a tool for collecting community information as well as linking health care professionals. Mr. Hassan said that the key players who need to help achieve this great ICT policy were Ministry of Health, College of Health Sciences, Tertiary Health Institutions, Universities and Health Research Institutions, Nugochi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, Ghana Health Service, Ghana Medical Stores, and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research. All these agencies need to pull resources and collaborate efforts if Ghana is to achieve its ICT goals in health. Enumerating the current challenges associated with the manual way of managing patients' data, Hassan identified longer waiting time, labour intensive, inaccurate, multiple folders or ID cards, lost history, difficult to analyze. The greatest challenge to the integration of ICT into health delivery system in Ghana, as stated by Hassan, is the people's resistance to change, as well as the inadequacy of ICT logistics, inadequacy of infrastructure and the duplication of effort by various government agencies.

Mr. Hassan said that in spite of the great challenges facing the mainstreaming ICT into data management system of patients' the success story is that the Ghana Health Service has database system for the collation of data from various facilities. Also, most Health schools have introductory courses on ICT, thus preparing the new health personnel to effectively use ICT in their work. He was also pleased that health professional own their own computers, mobile phones and have access to the internet and that fact also that many referral facilities have their own LAN and some form of database and internet connectivity. The fact that the use of ICT tools in managing data at the health centers reduces waiting time, is cost effective, more effective planning and easy sharing of data were also discussed.

Mr. Hassan in ending his presentation said that the way forward in ensuring that there is up to date data of patients' at the health centers is the formation of closer collaboration between stakeholders to ensure judicious use of public resources. The health institutions should also embark on training and regular refresher courses for service providers and enhance awareness creation among health workers about ICTs so as to get them to accept ICT as an enabler and above all m get more commitment from the government in providing the necessary infrastructure

A practical demonstration of the use of ICTs in managing both patient's data and enhance the claims system between health centers and the National Health Insurance scheme was showcased by Mr. William Nsiah Asare of Filla Consult. This software called the **HOCMAN** is made to help health centers manage their NHIS claims as well as the general accounting systems of the hospitals.

Participants were very thrilled about the workshop and as some of them explained; it was their first time of hearing that there was an ICT policy for health in Ghana. The however, urged GINKS and SavSign not to join the wagon of NGO's that specialize in organizing seminars but do very little to concretize the concepts they stand for. Mr. Wahab form the Tamale teaching Hospital said among other things that NGO's should endeavor to impress upon government to see the need to invest in ICT infrastructure since it is the only surest way to ensure that the equipment is available then train the human resource to manage them. The Northern Regional ICT coordinator of National health Insurance Authority, Mr. Ndo S. Emmanuel also opined that there should be the strengthening of collaborations between the Health Insurance Authority and the various health centers where the hospitals will create more entry points to attend to the various patients' who visit the hospital since other health posts in the country have done that. He said when this is done then NHIA will also employ personnel to man such centers and this will eventually improve the general health delivery system in the North and Ghana as a whole.