



TROPICAL DERMATOLOGY

‘STORE-AND-FORWARD’ TELEDERMATOLOGY FORUM: A MODEL TO SUPPORT AN UNDER-RESOURCED TROPICAL DERMATOLOGY SERVICE AND ENHANCE EDUCATION

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Background: Many Tropical Dermatology services are significantly under-resourced with financial restrictions and limited facilities for investigation, placing major onus on experience and expertise to make clinical diagnoses and provide optimum treatment. In addition, the number of Dermatologists is severely limited and isolated practitioners are placed under significant professional pressure.

Observation: In 2009, a Tropical African Teaching Hospital, appointed their first single-handed Consultant Dermatologist, who had just completed his Dermatology training. He is responsible for providing a secondary Dermatology service to a local population of 4.8 million and a tertiary service to an additional population of more than 6 million.

To help address this challenge, in 2012 a ‘store-and forward’ teledermatology forum was established. Brief clinical histories, accompanied by images, of diagnostically and therapeutically challenging cases were regularly shared by email with an initial forum of four committed European Dermatologists. Their prompt comments were shared across the forum. Over time, the forum has grown to include three Dermatologists from the USA. The format allows the further sharing of opinions from local colleagues, enhancing the expertise of the forum, to the benefit of patients and the education of members of the forum. In addition, the accumulated cases have provided an exceptional teaching resource of Tropical Dermatology for trainees of the forum’s participants. Since 2012, approximately 310 cases have been discussed on the teledermatology forum, ranging from disfiguring phycomycosis, which responded to itraconazole, to members of a family with lamellar ichthyosis, who have shown a significant response to acitretin. Cases which exemplify the value of the ‘store and forward’ teledermatology forum will be illustrated.

Key message: An international ‘store-and-forward’ teledermatology forum is a useful model to explore to sustain and enhance the quality of a Dermatology service in a resource limited environment and provides an educational opportunity for participants and their trainees.

