

Broadband in Rural and Regional Communities

Royal Flying Doctor Service (South Eastern Section)

Submission

The Royal Flying Doctor Service in Broken Hill recently completed a “Manage Network Project” funded by the Department of Health and Aging to provide a centralised electronic medical records system.

This project addressed the need to provide clinicians with access to reliable patient histories. Previously the RFDS had not moved to centralised electronic medical records mainly due to the lack of or limited broadband access from remote locations.

Medical officers required to have access to more complete centralised records. With all of a patient’s medical history in one location, medical officers could work from more complete data, speeding up diagnosis and getting treatment underway sooner. A consolidated record would also provide the doctor with the bigger picture, including family history, medications prescribed and any reactions or potential interactions. This access provides for **“Improved Clinical Care Decisions”**.

In order for centralised medical records to work successfully, access from remote locations, such as Wilcannia, Ivanhoe, Tibooburra, White Cliffs etc, was needed.

Telstra’s new Next G, 3G Town and Country broadband network meet the needs of our project for most of these remote locations. Where Next G access is not present or very low signal, then the option of downloading patients onto the laptop is available and up loading at the end of the day. This process is not ideal as it adds complexity to the infrastructure design and also increases the workload on the health professionals.

Our preference is to have broadband access from all our clinic locations, as this provides instant online up to date clinical information and also provides other information’s via the Internet for the Health Professional. It is essential for Health Professionals working in remote locations to have access to information in order to provide the level of care required.

Through another project “Clever Networks” partly funded by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts will provide central medical records for all the Royal Flying Doctor Bases across Australia. This project is a National RFDS project and is in its infancy but remote access will be a focal point for this project. Due to a number of locations across Australia with no broadband facilities then the only option is Satellite. Satellite comes with its own issues such as bandwidth, latency, costs both capital and ongoing, and in our case portability.

The Key Point from an RFDS perspective is, broadband in the bush provides health professionals with access to vital information in order to provide effective patient care.