

## **COVID crisis provides boost to telemedicine industry**

COVID 19 pandemic has accelerated adoption of digital technologies across many sectors. In the healthcare sector, telemedicine has enabled patients to access medical service from their homes and it has prevented overcrowding in hospitals and clinics.

In an interview to MVIRDC World Trade Center Mumbai, Dr Alexander Kuruvilla, Chief Health Strategy Officer, Practo explains the recent trend in the telemedicine sector in India. Practo is India's leading digital healthcare firm that provides online medical service to 18 crore patients annually across 15 countries through its more than 1 lakh registered doctors. Dr. Kuruvilla feels that the trend of accessing medical services online will continue even after the pandemic.

### **Excerpts of the interview:**

#### **Q1 What are the trends you are witnessing in the telemedicine industry in India after the outbreak of COVID-19?**

Telemedicine has been around for close to two decades but it is only post Covid that its full potential is being explored. It has changed the way primary healthcare is being delivered now.

One of the important factors for its growth is that Telemedicine can address outpatient queries, prevent overcrowding of hospitals, allowing them to address those that are symptomatic and are critical. Telemedicine will witness a long term play, particularly for follow up consultation where the doctors know the patient's history. In these times of extended lockdown and social distancing, people have increasingly adopted telemedicine for their doctor consultations. Online doctor consultations in Practo has grown by 500% dramatically since March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

There is now greater acceptance and attention for digital health solutions, especially telemedicine and we believe that the trend will continue even after the pandemic. Doctors from 20+ specialities on Practo are seeing continuous increase in the number of consults post lockdown. With telemedicine solving for access, quality and affordability, telemedicine is becoming mainstream soon.

#### **Q2. The Government of India released telemedicine guidelines in March 2020, thereby providing much needed clarity and legitimacy to the industry. How do you find India's guidelines compared to similar guidelines in other countries?**

The Telemedicine Practice guidelines are comprehensive and extremely digital-friendly and have been carefully drafted after taking account of all the developments in the healthcare sector in the last two decades, and especially since the advent of the internet. Telemedicine is seen as the first line of defense, and it's vital that all healthcare institutions and registered medical practitioners use this tool to help more and more people, keeping public health and safety in

mind. Telemedicine allows people to consult a qualified doctor instead of self-medicating and do all that affordably.

With the growing attention for telemedicine services, countries around the world are developing a regulatory framework for the industry. Some of the countries that widely use telemedicine are Canada, US, Australia and the UK, to name a few. India is slowly adopting telemedicine as a way of accessing healthcare and the early adoption of a regulatory framework will help the segment grow rapidly.

**Q3. According to one estimate, India's telemedicine industry is set to reach USD 5 billion by 2025 from the current level of USD 1 billion. What is your forecast for the telemedicine industry in India and how can poor people in remote villages benefit from this industry?**

According to a [McKinsey report](#), India could save up to USD 10 billion in 2025, if telemedicine replaced 30% to 40% of in-person outpatient consultations and there is digitization in the overall healthcare industry. Much of the current focus in healthcare is on the near-term challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, beyond the current crisis, healthcare technology veterans are already seeing major changes that promise to become permanent realities.

India's digital connectivity is expected to reach 80% access in 2034, with rural Internet users increasing by 58% annually. With smartphone and internet penetration growing, rural India is getting tech savvy with every passing day and are adopting new technologies that can improve their lifestyle. Given the lack of access to quality healthcare, especially in rural India, telemedicine can be a revolutionary tool that has the power to minimise these critical imbalances through technology. Anyone with a smartphone will have 24\*7 access to verified doctors no matter which part of the country they are in. This trend can drive the adoption of telemedicine and other digital technologies, thereby increasing access to healthcare for people in rural areas.

## Notifications

### Press Information Bureau, Government of India

Prime Minister interacts with his counterpart in Israel

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1630762>

Prime Minister interacts with his counterpart in Cambodia

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1630727>

COVID 19 Bulletin

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1630701>

**DGFT**

Amendment in export policy of diagnostic kits

[https://dgft.gov.in/sites/default/files/Noti%2009%20eng\\_0.pdf](https://dgft.gov.in/sites/default/files/Noti%2009%20eng_0.pdf)

**CBIC**

Extension of anti-dumping duty on nylon tyre cord fabric

<https://www.cbic.gov.in/resources//htdocs-cbec/customs/cs-act/notifications/notfns-2020/cs-add2020/csadd15-2020.pdf>