

Over the past decade, medicine has witnessed significant change with the utilisation of communication and technology tools to transmit, store, and retrieve digital data for clinical purposes. With emerging electronic health (eHealth) aimed at integrating clinical care management and providing web-based health information and patient care including remote monitoring and healthcare, eHealth solutions have emulated e-commerce and e-government strategies in using internet-based networked technologies to provide healthcare services.

As few health institutions deploying eHealth tools to provide efficient health services, the absence of a National eHealth Strategy to facilitate a systematic, coherent and sustainable implementation of telemedicine and eHealth in the country, medical experts say, has made the development of eHealth and integration into the nation's healthcare delivery system difficult.

While experts seek that telemedicine and eHealth should be integrated into medical/health training institutions' curriculum in the country, they have tasked the Federal Government to promote advocacy in ensuring the three tiers of government are involved in developing eHealth strategy, with active participation of major stakeholders — private sector academia/universities, development partners, professional bodies and associations, etc.

In a recent interview with BusinessDay, Eyitayo Lambo, former minister of health, says the implementation of eHealth in Nigeria has largely been piecemeal and uncoordinated as existing pilots were rarely scaled-up.

While decrying the absence of a comprehensive national eHealth strategy, Lambo enumerates numerous challenges in achieving this such as lack of policy and an eHealth legislative framework, lack of political will, absence of a robust ICT infrastructure, poor funding of the health sector, etc.

"eHealth would provide efficient and cost effective healthcare services for people in remote areas through early diagnostics, logistics and supplies as well as help individuals to make informed decisions about their health," Lambo says.

The former minister explained that the National Health Policy and the National Strategic Health Development Plan Framework (2009 – 2015), developed by the Federal Ministry of Health were key documents upon which any work towards developing the eHealth policy should be based.

Lambo hints that developing a national eHealth Strategy involves a multi-stakeholder participatory approach and a credible strategy development process, by which the eHealth strategy would be aligned to the strategic priorities of the health sector.

“The Federal Ministry of Health should facilitate a coherent and sustainable implementation of eHealth in Nigeria, get every level of government involved and provide enabling environment for implementation. Factors that could facilitate implementation of eHealth include a national ICT policy and a well developed and efficient mobile telecommunications infrastructure,” Lambo says.

**Source: *Businessday***