

**6TH ANNUAL MULTI-STAKEHOLDER FORUM ON SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION
FOR THE SDGs, 4 MAY 2021
SESSION 1: LESSONS FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**



World Telehealth Initiative's (WTI) innovation is to provide humanitarian medical expertise delivered through donated telehealth technology to vulnerable populations in low-and middle-income countries (LMICs). Throughout the pandemic WTI has worked tirelessly in our efforts to expand health equity and build sustainable capacity with our partners in communities across the globe. One of our most successful affiliations has been with HOPE Hospital for Women in Bangladesh. HOPE provides care to rural Bangladeshis through education and community outreach in the fight against high maternal/child mortality rates.

Before the pandemic, the Bangladeshi health sector was already grappling with meeting healthcare needs. In 2017, HOPE's critical health services were scaled up for Rohingya refugees, nearly a million people, and the surrounding host communities. Even without the additional threat of COVID, vulnerable populations in communities such as the Rohingya refugee camp were at risk of communicable diseases. The pandemic added additional stress to an already fragile health system within the crowded settlements. HOPE's patient population is very vulnerable and at high-risk for COVID. WTI-HOPE's collective efforts led to the establishment of two 50-bed COVID isolation units, one in Cox's Bazar and one in the Rohingya Refugee Camp. Operating 24/7, each of these 50-bed hospital units provides a comprehensive treatment program that includes clinical care pre-triage/triage; testing/diagnosing; isolation; referral of critically ill patients to tertiary hospitals. The WTI-HOPE collaboration during the pandemic has strengthened our partnership, allowing WTI to grow our remote specialty provider team which now furnishes care in the areas of pulmonology, internal medicine, infectious disease, and COVID care procedures. Throughout the pandemic, patient consultations are occurring several times per week and the physician team continues to grow.

For WTI, the needs of the host community must be the primary driver of global health engagements. *They* design the program, and we implement it. We work with partner sites wanting further medical expertise and support. These locations are often introduced to us by academic institutions, other NGOs or medical mission groups that want to make their efforts SUSTAINABLE, rather than just providing support when they are able to periodically visit the country. Now we have many qualified sites requesting our services as we have built a reputation. We would like to provide healthcare access to all.

WTI offers 4 applications of care: peer-to-peer didactics, scheduled clinical consultations, surgical mentoring, and emergent, high-acuity use cases. We know the need for our capacity-building model exists – we continue to increase the number of our clinics even through COVID. As WTI grows, we will be targeting not only the expansion of our care, but the sustainability of our care within each health ecosystem. Working closely with all stakeholders, this will be done through focusing on 5 key inter-linked factors: user-centered program design; training of our partners in our digital solution; ease of technical function; understanding the healthcare ecosystem environment; and acknowledgement of the broader extrinsic ecosystem of care where we operate. WTI does not see our digital innovation as a means to an end, but rather as an innovated method that is centered on solving problems, creating access, improving health, and saving lives of vulnerable populations throughout the world.

We partner with Teladoc, the leading telehealth provider in the world, who donates proprietary, cloud-based network access and virtual care devices for use in under-served communities. Through our relationships with health systems and physician networks, we have thousands of professional healthcare providers requesting to volunteer with our organization. In-country healthcare systems and providers invite us to assist them in building their capacity and providing quality healthcare.

WTI is currently the only NGO providing telehealth services in this exact manner. The potential to scale is limitless. WTI has so much promise that there is not enough time in the day to work towards replicating our model globally, providing sustainable, equitable healthcare for all vulnerable populations. In order to make our reach as broad as possible WTI needs to scale rapidly. By working with our partners across the globe, we are committed to making Sustainable Development Goal #3, Health for All, a reality. Thank you.