BioSpectrum the business of Bio & Health Sciences ASIA EDITION

Aus gas firm, Queensland univ setup telehealth network

February 19, 2013 | News | By BioSpectrum Bureau



Singapore: The University of Queensland's (UQ) Center for Online Health (COH) and natural gas developer QGC are jointly working on the Health e-Regions project to establish a comprehensive network of telehealth services in the towns of Dalby, Chinchilla and Miles in Queensland's Western Downs. The project is the first initiative of its kind to improve access to specialist health services for families living in remote areas and will be coordinated by UQ's main research commercialization company, UniQuest.

The funding for the project has been provided from QGC's $150 million Social Impact Management Plan, through which QGC manages social impacts and maximizes benefits from the Queensland Curtis LNG Project (the world's first coal seam gas to liquefied natural gas project). The $1.4 million contract UniQuest negotiated between the COH and QGC will see the Health e-REGIONS project rolled out from January 2013 until December 2014.

UniQuest Acting CEO, Mr Dean Moss, said that the partnership demonstrated how Australian communities are benefitting from academic research via industry collaboration. He said, "Advancements in telemedicine and e-health arising from UQ research are opening up new possibilities for improving access to key health resources, which tend to be centralised around capital cities. Partnerships like this one between the COH and QGC make it possible to introduce innovation to communities where it can make a powerful difference, as well as support the government's Rural Health Initiative and National E-health Strategy."

Associate Professor and COH deputy director and lead consultant, Mr Anthony Smith, said that the Health e-REGIONS project took shape following a study, funded by QGC, his team completed in August last year. The study confirmed that people living in regional and remote areas of Queensland have less equitable access to specialist services than their city cousins, with consequences for their well-being. He said, "The increasing demand for specialist care for diabetes, dermatology, geriatrics and general medicine, for example, plus the social and financial stress of travelling to Toowoomba or

Brisbane and then finding suitable accommodation, can be addressed cost-effectively with telehealth measures. The research clearly shows that positive outcomes can be achieved for patients, for the town, and for healthcare budgets."

QGC VP of Sustainability, Mr Brett Smith said that the company was pleased to be partnering with UQ in meeting the health needs of the community. He said, "Through the QGC Social Impact Management Plan we are committed to supporting rural health services delivery. The Health e-REGIONS project is a signature project under this commitment and is about improving access to specialist health services for local families."