

Korean doctors skeptical about Telemedicine

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Singapore: Korean doctors have expressed concern over the controversial telemedicine bill that is expected to be effective by next year. Doctors opine that they will no longer be able to provide proper medical care, as the patient's condition cannot be effectively diagnosed without physical examination.

Dr Shin Hyun-young, spokeswoman of the Korean Medical Association said, "As doctors, there are things that must be done in person in order to make the right diagnosis." Around 1, 10,000 medical professionals in Korea echoed Dr Hyun-young's sentiments and are against the Korean government's current plan to introduce telemedicine.

Telemedicine uses information technology and devices such as smart phones to provide healthcare at a distance. A total of five representative bodies of local health care provider's - doctors, nurses, pharmacists, doctors of traditional Korean medicine and dentists staged protests, against the Health Ministry's recent pilot program for telemedicine services, that kicked off on September, 19.

The members argued that telemedicine would lower the quality of medical services in Korea and jeopardize the operations of small local clinics and regional hospitals. It is also estimated that around 50,000 medical industry workers will lose their jobs following the legalization of telemedicine.

Dr Hyun-young added, "We consider this telemedicine plan to be a part of the government's initiative to introduce for-profit, IT-driven health care facilities in the country." An official at the Korean Pharmaceutical Association said, "The public has always preferred general hospitals over smaller clinics, and once telemedicine services become available, they would prefer to see doctors who practice in bigger hospitals."

The Korean government retorted to the protests stating that the telemedicine service, if legalized after the pilot program, would especially benefit the disabled, rural population and the elderly patients with chronic conditions that need constant medical attention.