

E-Health services ill-prepared for epidemics

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National and international organizations are ill-prepared to exploit e-health systems in the event of the emergence of a major pandemic disease, according to a research paper to be published in the *International Journal of Biomedical Engineering and Technology*.

E-[health systems](#) and associated information technology could radically alter the course of a pandemic disease, such as a major outbreak of influenza internationally. It could provide [healthcare workers](#), emergency services, patients and those at-risk with access to much-needed data on how disease is spreading and what measures could be taken to halt its progress. Unfortunately, suggest Junhua Li of the Asia-Pacific Ubiquitous Healthcare Research Centre (APuHC), at The University of New South Wales, Australia, and colleagues, the widespread adoption of e-health represents a significant disruption to current healthcare protocols and systems and stakeholders are not in a position to take full advantage of it.

Emergent infections have spread wildly throughout human history, plague, influenza and more recently SARS and MERS have claimed many lives. With the advent of global air travel, the potential for a previously unknown strain of an animal pathogen to jump the species gap and cause widespread human illness seems to be much greater than it ever was in the days when a round-the-world trip would take many months rather than a day or two.

Conversely, technology has brought us a much greater capacity through [modern medicine](#) to treat those infected and to stymie the spread of any

given pathogen. Additionally, fast global communications and super computers allow information and data concerning any given disease to be shared and studied in ways that were not possible even a decade ago.

Li and colleagues, Holly Seale, Pradeep Ray, Amina Tariq and Raina MacIntyre, suggest that the adoption of e-health principles could allow [healthcare facilities](#) to mitigate against the spread of [pandemic influenza](#), and perhaps other emergent pathogens. They have devised a multi-pronged approach to assessing the preparedness of authorities and organizations to utilize effectively e-health on the basis of specific knowledge, supportive policies, computing and communications facilities and access and adequate funding. Their approach should allow organizations to ascertain what is missing from their e-health systems if they have them and to implement the necessary technology and protocols where they are absent before a pandemic hits.

More information: "Are organizations prepared for e-health implementation to respond to pandemic influenza?" in Int. J. Biomedical Engineering and Technology, 2013, 11, 215-230

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