

New app helps Mali skin doctors reach out to distant patients

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A doctor takes pictures of a man's skin condition for diagnosis through an online dermatology platform in Mali

In Mali, where skin conditions are widespread and skin doctors are scarce, physicians have turned to technology to treat patients remotely.

From his Bamako office, Professor Ousmane Faye, one of a small number of dermatologists in Mali, examines photos of an arm and a

torso afflicted by a [skin](#) pigmentation disorder.

The photos arrived the same day the patient visited his doctor in Koulikoro, 57 kilometres (35 miles) away.

Faye's pilot programme, in place for 18 months, allows [general practitioners](#) working in even the most [remote areas](#) to consult with a specialist.

In a country that has around one dermatologist per million people, that is an invaluable aid. For in Mali, according to estimates, nearly 30 percent of the population suffers from [skin diseases](#), such as leprosy, psoriasis and eczema.

"The patient from Koulikoro suffers from hypochromia lesions with some healthy patches of skin," says Faye, head of dermatology at Mali's national disease control centre (CNAM).

"Two months ago, the patient had treatment that made the lesions worse," he added. By this he meant traditional remedies.

But thanks to the "Bogou" app, designed by a Malian developer, the professor can bring his specialist knowledge to bear on the information sent over by general practitioners, using his computer or even his mobile phone.



Dermatologist Ousmane Faye uses photos to remotely prescribe treatment for skin disorders in Mali

Using a secure platform protected with a password, Faye says he can see images posted by the general practitioner in Koulikoro.

"Then I can confirm the doctor's diagnosis and even give advice."

Provided clear images are available, Faye's line of work is particularly well-suited to remote diagnosis, as dermatology is based on observation by the human eye, he explains.

"There is a triple benefit: time, money and training", for the [doctors](#) out in the field, he says.

Next-day treatment

Out in Banamba, about 140 kilometres (90 miles) northeast of Bamako, patient Fatoumata Konare has reaped the benefits.

"It had been itching for a long time," she says of her skin condition.



Doctors in Mali have turned to technology to diagnose and treat patients remotely

Her doctor took photos when she went in to see him, sent them on, and told her to return the next day for a prescription.

"I went to buy the pills and the lotion and was healed. I don't need to go anywhere else, everything was taken care of in Banamba," she says.

The Pierre Fabre foundation which is financing the programme, said the

results have been "solid", with 175 complex cases diagnosed remotely.

The foundation promotes the use of new technologies to improve diagnosis and treatment of skin diseases in Africa, and the idea is to expand the project from Mali to other African countries.

Already, 20 doctors and nurses have been trained with a goal of extending the service throughout Mali over the next two years.

They will first focus on reaching the most disadvantaged and remote areas that have internet coverage.

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