

**March 2014**

**UWI TELEHEALTH/METHANEX TRINIDAD LIMITED PARTNERSHIP**

**Q: What is TeleMedicine?**

TeleMedicine is the use of telecommunications, health information and videoconferencing technologies to deliver medical care, health education and public health services.

**Q: What is UWI Telehealth Programme?**

The University of the West Indies Telehealth Programme is a Unit within the Faculty of Medical Sciences that brings together children of needy families with complex medical and surgical problems with specialists from overseas-based institutions, particularly the SickKids Hospital in Toronto, Canada. The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids), affiliated with the University of Toronto, is Canada's most research-intensive hospital and the largest centre dedicated to improving children's health in Canada.

**Q: What prompted the UWI Telehealth initiative?**

In Trinidad and Tobago, medical sub-specialists are few and are in limited medical disciplines. There are many children requiring sub-specialist care, who cannot afford to travel abroad for such care. The UWI Telehealth initiative grew out of the need to support these children and their families. In addition to providing financially challenged child patients with access to a world class facility and high quality health care not available locally, the programme is supporting the capacity building of local health professionals.

**Q: What disorders are considered for assistance?**

The UWI Telehealth Programme assists any child with a medical condition which cannot be diagnosed or treated locally. These include congenital defects of the bowel, heart, nervous system and other organs, developmental problems and conditions such as paediatric cancer and blood disorders.

**Q: How does the programme work?**

Children from needy families requiring diagnosis or treatment (not available locally) can be referred by anyone to the Programme Manager who is based at the UWI Telehealth Unit at the Mt. Hope Medical Sciences Complex. An assessment of the problem is made and a referral letter and supporting documents are obtained from the local doctor caring for the child. This is shared with SickKids Hospital in Toronto, Canada for an assessment. Thereafter, a video consultation session is arranged by Telehealth between the child’s local doctor, the child and parents/guardians, and specialist consultants at the SickKids Hospital. The consultation will guide further treatment.

If surgery is required and cannot be done locally, the child is referred to the Herbie Fund, Toronto Canada (which has an age limit of 16 years) for assistance. The Herbie Fund is a volunteer based fundraising group that has been raising money for the Herbie Fund for over 25 years at The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids). The group is dedicated to bringing children, who are in need of life-saving or life-altering surgeries from all parts of the world to SickKids for medical treatment.

If the child cannot be treated or diagnosed locally, the SickKids Hospital will work with the parents to facilitate a visit to Canada or another institution elsewhere. Other children may be treated locally with input from Canada.

**Q: How many local children/families have benefited from the UWI Telehealth Programme since 2004?**

From 2004 to 2013, 228 families have been assisted. There have been 223 consultations and 19 children received free surgeries at SickKids Hospital, paid for by the Herbie Fund at an estimated cost of US $1.6 million. Not all children coming to the facility require a video conference consultation with SickKids. They may only need assistance in navigating the local health care system.

**Q: What is the survival rate of children who have had consultations and surgeries?**

The survival rate is 100%.

**Q: Does UWI Telehealth offer other benefits ?**

Yes. In addition to allowing needy patients to access care and treatment not available locally, the programme:

* Reduces the wait time for appointments with overseas-based consultants;
* Reduces stress on the child and parents/guardians by removing the need for travel overseas and the attendant costs of airfare and accommodation;
* Provides a supportive network for the local medical community and reduces professional isolation;
* Increases access to professional education. Medical students and professionals can sit in on consultations to learn from the discussions;
* Facilitates research.

**Q: Is UWI Telehealth a part of the Caribbean-SickKids Paediatric Cancer and Blood Disorders Project that was launched in February 2013 ?**

The UWI Telehealth Programme is independent but closely linked to the Caribbean SickKids Initiative for cancer and blood disorders project. The Caribbean SickKids’ telemedicine arm is modelled and administered by the UWI Telehealth Programme. The University of the West Indies has graciously offered their IT network as a vehicle for communication among the 6 participating countries. Trinidad and Tobago is the “videoconferencing hub” for the Caribbean SickKids initiative and the UWI Telehealth facility is used for this purpose. In essence, UWI Telehealth is the telemedicine arm of this Caribbean initiative.

**Q: How is the Caribbean-SickKids project different from the UWI Telehealth Programme ?**

The Caribbean SickKids Paediatric Cancer and Blood Disorders Project is an outreach initiative of SickKids Foundation to help build health care capacity for managing cancer and blood disorders in six Caribbean countries - Barbados, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago and The Bahamas. This initiative includes training health professionals in nursing, laboratory and pharmacy services, provision of consultation and diagnostic expertise, and development and expansion of access to treatment and supportive care. The project includes a five-year plan for addressing the region's gaps in research, care and education in this area (2013 – 2017).

The UWI Telehealth Programme focuses on specialist consultations for local children with complex medical problems, inclusive of cancer and blood disorders.

**Q: How long has the UWI Telehealth Programme been in effect ?**

It was launched in 2004 as a partnership of UWI, ATLANTIC, Ministry of Health, SickKids Hospital and the Herbie Fund in Toronto. ATLANTIC was the major sponsor for 8 years until the end of 2012. Methanex Trinidad Limited has come on board as our major sponsor for an initial 3-year period beginning 2014. This is the oldest and only successful comprehensive videoconferencing facility in the Caribbean region offering the services of clinical consultations, training, research and administration using modern technology.

**Q: How much funding is Methanex investing ?**

US $150,000 over 3 years (close to TT $1 million). The funds will be used to help support the operations of the facility and the cost of clinical consultation with SickKids Hospital.