DECLARATION

16th Asia Telemedicine Symposium
and 3rd National Telemedicine Workshop 2023

On March 17, 2023, the 3rd National Telemedicine Workshop was conducted in Kathmandu with over ninety participants (virtual and physical) from Nepal and various parts of the world. The workshop was organized by the Telemedicine Society of Nepal (TMSoN) and Nepal Research and Education Network (NREN) in collaboration with the Telemedicine Development Center of Asia (TEMDEC), Kyushu University with support from Nepal Telecom Authority (NTA), World Health Organization (WHO), Nick Simons Institute (NSI), and Nepal Telecom (NTC).

In this highly intensive workshop, three main topics were covered:

1. Experience sharing in telemedicine: Telemedicine in different parts of the globe, and across various Institutes within Nepal.
2. Role of Nurses in Telemedicine.
3. Future of Telemedicine, Technology Standards, and Telemedicine Service Delivery Guidelines.

Since the 2nd Telemedicine Workshop Declaration in 2019, there have been a multitude and significant changes. During the pandemic years and after the "new normal" consequences, TMSoN and other agencies are actively involved in taking telemedicine services to the next level. There have been following remarkable developments in Nepal:

a. Telemedicine Guideline was formulated and endorsed for registered medical practitioners by the Nepal Medical Council in 2020.

b. Telemedicine and Online Health Services protocol was developed by the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP), Government of Nepal, in 2021.

c. Growth in the number of research studies.

d. Growth in the trend of implementing telemedicine services in various health institutions.

We, the participants acknowledge that:

• Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Digital Technologies are important and essential components in healthcare delivery through telemedicine. These technologies facilitate ensuring Telemedicine is becoming widely accessible and affordable.

• Besides primary healthcare services, an increasing number of specialties are being integrated and delivered through telemedicine. These include mental health, ICU, geriatrics, maternity, pediatric, physiotherapy, rehabilitation, urban health, cardiology, orthopedics and trauma services, and many more.

• A growing number of engineers, technologists, and healthcare professionals are collaboratively working for the successful implementation of telemedicine.

- The government of Nepal has been involved in developing telemedicine services.

- Advancements in telemedicine will enhance healthcare access and decrease costs.

We recognize that there is an immediate need to:

- Standardize telemedicine and its SOPs for all practitioners.

- Update the current Telemedicine Guideline and make it context-based, suitable, and relevant to geographical constraints, population awareness, and level of technological advancement in Nepal.

- Standardize the telemedicine-related terminology such as telehealth, ehealth, mhealth, digital health, etc., and policy language for remote healthcare delivery.

Hence, the 16th Asia Telemedicine Symposium and 3rd National Telemedicine Workshop 2023 passed the Resolution and presented it to the concerned Authority in the Government of Nepal to:

- Form a dedicated department within the Ministry of Health and Population in coordination with the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology to govern and regulate the telemedicine system and activities in Nepal.

- Form a Telemedicine Expert Group which includes domain experts and Institutes actively involved in developing telemedicine in Nepal.

- Allocate an adequate budget by the MoHP, Ministry of Science and Technology, and Ministry of Communication and Information Technology for the development, advancement, and regularization of Telemedicine.

- Create appropriate and necessary channels to leverage telemedicine for knowledge sharing and education amongst national and international communities.

- Formalize regular and effective training programs for all target groups and stakeholders involved in the delivery of telemedicine services.

- Create a proper and adequate reimbursement methodology for all human resources involved in telemedicine-based Healthcare Delivery.

- Ensure that the entire documentation process related to Telemedicine Activities and Service Delivery is incorporated into relevant EHR/EMR/HIMS systems.

- Telemedicine service must be included within the acceptable delivery methodologies of the national insurance fund and social security fund coverage.

- Create, Formulate, and Disseminate directives and protocols from MoHP, followed by orientation of stakeholders in telemedicine.

While governing the healthcare sector, it is equally important to:

- Standardize the healthcare software development systems, including patient privacy and data security.

- Recognizing the inclusion of nurses and paramedics is essential for the advancement of telemedicine.

- Institutionalize telemedicine activities within Nepal.

- Focus on less privileged and economically weaker sections of society as one of the principal beneficiaries of telemedicine services in both rural and urban areas.

- Empower healthcare service delivery workers while promoting and implementing telemedicine practices in rural and remote areas.

We, the participants, are collectively committed to working in our respective roles to support the development of telemedicine activities in Nepal.

To enhance cooperation, improve communication, and coordinate between telemedicine enthusiasts, practitioners, and engineers, organizations like the Telemedicine Society of Nepal and Nepal Research and Education Network must continue to play a significant and leading role.

We, the participants are thankful to TMSoN, NREN, and TEMDEC for creating this platform and will continue to support the implementation and expansion of telemedicine activities in Nepal. We, the participants, also agree that this workshop has motivated us. We have used this opportunity to discuss and debate issues that are crucial for increasing access to healthcare and safe clinical practices through telemedicine.