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Space law at Unispace III+ 50: consequences and future perspectives (4)

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THE PROMOTION OF (SPACE-BASED) TELEMEDICINE VIA UNISPACE+50

Abstract

Telemedicine enables medical services to jump across distances and provide better healthcare outcomes wherever needed. It is the employment of Information and Communications Technology, and increasingly satellite remote sensing and communications technology, to enable healthcare professionals to communicate, transmit data, interact with patients, and conduct trainings, in myriad ways. Overcoming geographic barriers, it enables actors (sometimes patients themselves) to apply modern medical care in rural or underdeveloped locations. With the development in medical and communications technologies and growing affordability of existing systems, the benefits of telemedicine become increasingly accessible for healthcare stakeholders, including clinics, health ministries, and humanitarian organisations. Ultimately, telemedicine deserves greater implementation.

The UNISPACE initiative has closely followed telemedicine, and it has been promoted in numerous related documents: Although raised at UNISPACE II, it received its first significant discussion at UNISPACE III, where the expansion of telemedicine via space-based services is one of 33 recommendations in the Vienna Declaration on Space and Human Development (a UNISPACE III outcome document). The UNISPACE III Report lists uses of remote sensing satellites in disease prevention, control, and monitoring; practical examples of telemedicine using mobile satellite communications for epidemic control; and recommends capacity-building and awareness-raising. The UNISPACE III+5 Report highlights that the COPUOS Scientific and Technical Subcommittee (STSC) adopted a space-based telemedicine work plan; refers to the UN Programme on Space Applications' five priority themes adopted after UNISPACE III, including "satellite communications for tele-education and telemedicine applications"; and describes the related work of COPUOS' Action Team on Public Health. COPUOS has identified seven thematic priorities for UNISPACE+50, including "Strengthened Space Cooperation for Global Health", and the STSC's Expert Group on Space and Global Health has discussed means to increase cooperation between space and health organisations in preparation for UNISPACE+50.

Much more has happened, but the above reflects the priority UN space stakeholders place on (space-based) telemedicine. Looking to the past and future, this presentation will examine telemedicine's technological development and how UNISPACE discussions have evolved over time; what achievements have come from the UNISPACE initiative, in particular regarding law and policy; and what future objectives different actors may have through UNISPACE+50, such as from public health, the healthcare industry, and Member States. And considering UNISPACE+50's potential to cement further international cooperation around (space-based) telemedicine, this presentation will evaluate its possible law and policy-related objectives. Ultimately, this presentation will ask how UNISPACE+50 can make the greatest contribution for expanding telemedicine.