



Teledermatology offers expert services to rural Australians

New teledermatology services are bringing skin, hair and nail expertise to the bush and to the Torres Strait, according to speakers at the Australasian College of Dermatologists' Annual Scientific Meeting in Darwin.

Dr Robert Miller spoke to delegates about the new teledermatology service that he has been offering to patients in Far North Queensland and in the Torres Strait for the past year.

He estimates that his email consultations have saved Queensland Health up to \$20,000 in that time.

"For many Australians living in remote and rural places, access to specialist medical services can be difficult, mainly because of the geography of our huge nation," says Dr Miller.

"For example, for patients living in Torres Strait, the travel and accommodation costs involved in visiting Townsville or another major centre to see a dermatologist may be between \$800 and \$1500. The time taken to travel from their remote community or island to Thursday Island and then fly onwards to the east coast adds greatly to expenses.

"I've found that offering email consultations and real time teleconferencing to my patients in remote areas via the internet, whilst not ideal, is one way to ensure good and timely dermatological care.

"I provided consultations for 60 patients in the past year, of whom about half were Torres Strait Islanders or Aboriginal.

"The conditions treated involved severe acute skin conditions as well as common skin complaints and surgical dermatology cases including skin cancer.

"In the indigenous community in particular, it's crucial for skin diseases to receive medical attention as some skin problems may lead to permanent systemic illnesses, such as rheumatic heart disease and kidney failure."

Requests for email consultations with dermatologist Dr Miller are made via the usual channel of the local GP or health practitioner, and most cases referred to him receive a reply within 24 to 48 hours.

"Using the technology available to us, we're making dermatology accessible to those who would otherwise not be able to have the help of a specialist to treat their diseases within a reasonable time period," says Dr Miller.

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MEDIA ENQUIRIES

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