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Tongkah, US firm offer service to hospitals

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TONGKAH Holdings Bhd has teamed up with US-based Worldcare Ltd to offer telemedicine service at its Pantai Hospital chain and to other interested parties within the region.

Tongkah executive chairman Mokhzani Mahathir yesterday said the joint venture company, Worldcare Health (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, would apply for the Multimedia Super Corridor status and also participate in the MSC Request for Proposals exercise.

The RFP exercise is to help MSC's co-ordinating body, Multimedia Development Corporation Sdn Bhd, to finalise the parameters for the MSC's flagship applications - which includes telemedicine.

Speaking after the signing ceremony at Shangri-La Hotel in Kuala Lumpur, Mokhzani said about RM15 million would be invested in the venture over the next two years.

Apart from linking up the five Pantai Hospitals, the joint venture company will also set up eight major nodes nationwide which other interested parties can tap into.

These parties include private hospitals, government-run hospitals and private practitioners.

Mokhzani said the telemedicine service allowed local doctors to get added credibility as their diagnoses and treatments would be backed by advice from foreign specialists at a fraction of the cost of travelling overseas.

"The system allows doctors to get second opinions from specialists at Worldcare consortium hospitals in the United States."

They are Massachusetts General Hospital, the Cleveland Clinic Foundation, Duke University Medical Centre and John Hopkins University Hospital.

Diagnoses are conducted through electronic mail and images sent over the Internet.

Images like X-rays and CAT scans are compressed up to 30 times using a wavelet compression technology so as to give higher resolutions.

Worldcare Ltd chief executive officer Nasser Menhall said medical technicians would monitor the e-mail round the clock.

In terms of costings using this telemedicine service, Massachusetts General Hospital radiology department chairman Dr James Hunter Thrall said in a video-conferencing session, savings up to 80 per cent were possible.

"The savings are mainly that of not having to travel overseas to get consultations or operations, lower hospitalisation costs in the patient's own country and on follow-up treatment."

Worldcare Ltd began operating in 1994, and has since expanded its services outside the United States to Jordan and United Arab Emirates. It will soon establish links with hospitals in Italy, France and the London Clinic in the United Kingdom..

Worldcare Malaysia is intended to be the telemedicine hub for Asia. Tongkah and Worldcare Ltd hold 30 per cent stakes each, with two other investors - Mitsubishi Corporation and Saudia Binladin Group's Concorde Investments Ltd - holding stakes of 15 and 25 per cent respectively.

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