



Promoting mobile health in Latin America with MWCB and Telefónica

RITMOS, an international research, development and innovation network, will be rolling out projects that incorporate and standardize mobile technology in health (mHealth) to give patients greater control over their health and to improve processes and services. With the support of the WHO office in the Americas, the initiative will permit "the analysis of big data generated by mHealth to prevent illnesses" and "the export of know-how in mHealth that we have developed here in projects such as the Personal Health Record and the e-Prescription".

Fostering the use of mobile devices to promote health and improve the patient's wellbeing and care processes is the aim of RITMOS, the Latin American mHealth Technologies Network, which will be leading the eHealth research group of the UOC Health Sciences Department (the eHealthLab) over the next four years.

In the words of Dr **Francesc Saigí**, manager of the project and director of the UOC University Master's Degree in Telemedicine, "this international cooperation network in RDI and education will deepen and strengthen the cooperation in telemedicine in which a great many of us RITMOS members have already been involved, taking into account that we will now have **funding for four years, the participation of two strategic institutional and technological partners such as the Mobile World Capital Barcelona (MWCB) Foundation and Telefónica**, and the active collaboration of the eHealth Programme of the **Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO)**, the regional office of the World Health Organization for the Americas."

The RITMOS project will receive **€80,000 in funding**, which was approved last December by the Latin American Science and Technology for Development Programme (CYTED). The network **brings together 13 working groups and 58 researchers** from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Spain. According to Saigí, "the initiative will roll out strategies in Latin America that will permit the **effective integration of mobile technologies in health services** (mHealth) to provide access to health systems, improve lifestyles, focus on illness prevention aspects and achieve self-management by patients with chronic illnesses."

The director of the project stresses the strength of RITMOS as being "the **complementary nature of the members involved**: the Latin American universities and research centres will help us detect the needs that are a priority to be tackled; MWCB and Telefónica will bring their know-how of the development of apps and mobile technologies that allow health data to be shared; while the UOC, in close collaboration with the PAHO/WHO, will provide the know-how and policy instruments needed to be able to translate the potential of mHealth in health services in Latin America into specific experiences."

In short, RITMOS brings together in collaboration a wide diversity of agents, which should **provide real answers to real needs**. Previously, **Saigí** comments, "the majority of the members already worked together on another platform (CICUT, the Latin American University Collaboration Cluster in Telemedicine), which has borne fruit in four International Telemedicine Symposia, two research projects, a number of science publications and two doctoral theses; we are, therefore, starting from the basis of a mature network with which, thanks to the new partners and resources, we will be able to **take a qualitative leap towards specific actions and export, for example, the know-how in mHealth that we have developed here in projects such as the Personal Health Record and the e-Prescription, examples that lead respectively to the empowerment of the patient and to the sustainability of services.**"

Two events are scheduled for 2015: the Network start-up meeting, which will be held in the first quarter at the home of the UOC's Internet Interdisciplinary Institute (IN3), and the 2015 RITMOS-International Workshop, which will take place in Barcelona in mid-October 2015 to present the progress and results of the project's research, development and innovation. This workshop will be held jointly with the Fifth International Telemedicine Symposium.

mHealth, an emerging field

The application of mobile technologies in health (mHealth) is an emerging field that has come about as a complementary form of healthcare provision. The ubiquitous connectivity of mobile networks, thanks to satellite navigation technologies and the proliferation of mobile devices, especially smartphones (the growth in wireless subscriptions has reached over six billion mobile subscribers worldwide), has favoured the incorporation of mHealth and wellbeing.

According to **Saigí**, "**mHealth solutions could contribute to the efficiency of healthcare provision thanks to real-time communication with patients and the exchange of the app users' data. The analysis of big data generated by mHealth may also help us improve prevention of diseases, as it allows us to construct a more precise and comprehensive picture of illnesses and of patients' behaviour.**" Lastly, and no less importantly, mHealth solutions support the changing role of patients, from being passive to more participative, while improving their responsibility for their own health.