

Rural Russian Health Outposts to Launch Skype Medical Consultations

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Russia's health minister wants to provide those living in remote communities with better access to medical advice by introducing consultations via Skype, a news report said Wednesday.

Veronika Skvortsova said plans were in place to supply all rural health posts — medical centers in rural areas that provide first-aid diagnoses — with Internet cables in the next two years, the Rossiiskaya Gazeta state newspaper reported.

"In this way, we will be able to use certain telemedicine technologies over Skype," she was cited as saying in the report. "There will be doctors on duty around the clock and they will be in contact with the settlements as needed, including [offering] all types of emergency aid, air ambulances and so on."

According to Skvortsova, there are 83,000 villages with populations of less than 100 people

across Russia but due to a lack of qualified personnel it would be impossible to build a health post in each of these communities.

Telemedicine, the remote diagnosis and treatment of patients, is therefore "one of the most important conditions for providing quality care in remote areas," Skvortsova was cited as saying by Rossiiskaya Gazeta.

Data from market research company TNS showed that more than half of the country's population — or 82 million Russians — had access to the Internet as of April 2015, the TASS news agency reported.

Internet coverage in remote towns and villages rose to 51 percent last year up from 46 percent in 2013, Sergei Plugotarenko, the head of the Russian Association of Electronic Communications, was cited as saying by TASS.

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