

# Hospital-based telemedicine in Albania, current status and future perspectives: A literature review

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## Abstract:

**Background:** Hospital-based telemedicine, in the context of digital health, refers to the use of information and communication technology in hospital services, within the framework of disease management and remote healthcare. Since 2009, Albania, an upper-middle-income country has set up the hospital-based telemedicine programme, including secondary and tertiary hospital services, which culminated in the establishment of National Telemedicine Centre in Tirana.

**Aim:** We aim to evaluate the hospital telemedicine service in Albania, the advantages, challenges and barriers of this service to date, as well as the prospects for its continuation and improvement.

**Methods:** A recent literature review (December 2022) was conducted using Boolean operators with keywords such as: (“Telemedicine” AND “Albania”). Two databases (PubMed and Medline) were searched for all relevant articles to date. No limitations were made in regard to language, time period, context or study design. However, this study took the form of a comprehensive review rather than a systematic review.

**Results:** We found in total 20 articles, with most of them focusing on the compilation of the implementation process strategy "Initiate-build-operate-transfer". Results from the included studies showed an increase in public access to telemedicine, where the major specialty's services used by patients were radiology, neurotrauma and stroke, with approximately 82.9% of all requests. The patient transfer/nontransfer ratio in Albania was about 0.3, hereupon the majority of patients were kept at regional hospitals and did not require transfer to a tertiary center.

**Conclusions:** The few studies conducted in Albania have shown that hospital-based telemedicine is very likely to be effective in terms of quality of life of the patients, quality of service and cost. However, the greatest challenge lies in the “transfer” phase, in which stakeholders must ensure the integrity and stability of telemedicine, in accordance with appropriate protocols and standards.

**Keywords:** telemedicine, hospital, service, review, Albania