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Telemedicine Goes 2G
Cisco's Healthpresence Focuses on Rural India

■ 'ATM of health care services'

By SUNITA SOHRABJI
India-West Staff Reporter

U.S. technology giant Cisco Nov. 14 unveiled the second generation of its platform for telemedicine, known as Healthpresence, focusing its efforts on India where at least 175 million rural dwellers lack access to any health care services.

Healthpresence allows physicians in several countries to remotely conduct consultations with patients who may be hundreds of miles away. In India, private hospitals, the defense sector and state governments in Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh have signed on to use Healthpresence; the service is already available in 11 districts and can be accessed by up to one million people.

A village woman and her baby in Raichur, Karnataka are shown using Cisco's HealthPresence, which gives them remote access to physicians and specialists. (photo courtesy of Cisco)

Vipin Verma Runs for Congress in Florida

By RICHARD SPRINGER
India-West Staff Reporter

Photos of three Democratic Party presidents — Barack Obama, Bill Clinton and John F. Kennedy — are bannered across the top of the page next to the photo of congressional candidate Vipin Verma of Daytona Beach, Fla., on his campaign Web site.

An attorney, Verma is running for Congress in the Seventh District race in the Florida Democratic primary Aug. 14.

He told **India-West** that he is running on a progressive platform that includes "rebuilding the education system," closing tax loopholes for corporations and investing in infrastructure to revitalize manufacturing in the U.S.

Florida congressional candidate Vipin Verma introduces himself to a fire department official on the campaign trail.

Cisco's New Healthpresence Focuses on Rural India

"In India, there's a huge mismatch between the availability of doctors and where they're needed," Vishal Gupta, vice president and general manager of Cisco Global Healthcare Solutions, told **India-West** by teleconference from Bangalore, where he is based. Patients must often travel hundreds of miles to see a physician, he said, noting that the need for doctors and specialists is most acute in rural India.

"We want to be the ATM of healthcare services," said Gupta, envisioning Healthpresence kiosks in a variety of rural and semi-urban settings, such as malls.

An earlier version of the product, which was released two years ago, required Cisco's Telepresence, a high bandwidth platform. But the version of Healthpresence rolled out by Cisco last week can be used on low bandwidth platforms, including desktop computers.

Healthpresence 2.0 features the flexibility to be used across several platforms, from a high-end Telepresence-based system, to a low bandwidth version which is portable and can be used in a mobile medicine van, said Gupta, noting that bandwidth is still an issue in many remote parts of India.

The new version of Healthpresence can be maintained on a server by a service provider who provides repairs and updates to the system, eliminating the need for an in-house IT specialist and lowering the overall cost, said Gupta.

Healthpresence patients sit in a

Vishal Gupta, vice president and general manager of Cisco Global Healthcare Solutions, which is based in Cisco's Bangalore campus. (photos courtesy of Cisco)

Sunita Maheshwari, founder of RxDx, uses Healthpresence to remotely connect with patients in the low-income village of Raichur.

special consulting room – known as a primary health care center - which has a screen allowing them to see their doctor, and specialized diagnostic equipment including a digitized stethoscope which allows a doctor to listen to his patient's heart and lungs remotely.

A digitized torch and otoscope allow the physician to remotely examine a patient's ears, nose and throat.

Healthpresence can also be used by specialists.

Sunita Maheshwari, a Banga-

lore-based pediatric cardiologist and founder of RxDx, which uses Healthpresence to connect to patients in the low-income district of Raichur in northen Karnataka, said Cisco's product works very well in telemedicine.

"We were skeptical at first, wondering will rural India's villages accept such technology. But they're really thrilled because they have a doctor out there for the first time," the Indian American Maheshwari, who was trained at Yale, told **India-West**.

RxDx remote clinics provide

primary care doctors from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on a walk-in basis, and appointments can be made for consultations with specialists. The clinic has a staff of 70 physicians, with a mix of specialties, including pediatrics, and serves about 600 patients a month in Raichur, which is an overnight train journey from Bangalore.

Maheshwari – dubbed the "Queen of Hearts" by India Today magazine – said she hopes to next hook up with practices in remote states such as Bihar to provide Healthpresence services there.

She estimated that one-quarter of India's 700 million village dwellers – 175 million people – currently lack access to any healthcare services.

The Osmania University alumnus said the desktop version of Healthpresence was very scalable and could be used anywhere. "I could be sitting anywhere and treating patients not just in Raichur, but also in Tanzania," she asserted.

The need for access to healthcare in India has gone up phenomenally with the advent of chronic diseases in the population. The country accounts for 60 percent of the world's heart disease patients, according to data released last year by the World Health Organization, and is home to 35 million diabetics, the largest number on the globe.

Cancer is also on the rise with almost 400,000 people in India dying each year from various types of the disease. The overall oncology market is growing at about 20 percent per annum, Pradeep Jaisingh, founder and CEO of New Delhi-based International Oncology, told **India-West** in June.

Gupta stated that the Indian government has shown its commitment to telemedicine, promising to increase funding to public health care.

And in September, Sachin Pilot, India's young Minister of Communications and Information Technology, unveiled a plan that would lay out 500,000 miles of optical fibre throughout the country, bringing high-speed connectivity to every remote area of India within the next two years.

Attorney Vipin Verma Runs For Congress in Florida

Verma attended elementary, middle and high schools in Port Orange, Fla., and received a B.S. in biochemistry in just three years from the University of Florida at Gainesville.

He graduated with honors from the Florida State University College of Law in Tallahassee, where he was chosen to speak for new lawyers at the induction ceremony because he achieved "the highest bar exam score in 5th District Court of Appeal in Florida."

Licensed to practice law in Florida and Illinois, the Indian American law school graduate started his own law firm, Verma & Associates, in Daytona Beach. The firm does both criminal and civil law and has an immigration practice.

"During my college years, I decided I wanted to be in public life and serve as an elected official. I believe in my ability to make a difference in people's lives and contribute to the betterment of society," Verma said on his Web site.

He told **India-West** that with the lack of jobs, it is shameful that Congress is engaged in "infighting and

making political points" instead of getting people back to work.

Members of Congress, he added, need to "rise above" partisan bickering to return the country "back to the prosperity we once had."

Verma pointed out that General Electric "paid no taxes in 2010. Paying zero dollars is unacceptable. There is never a scenario where (a corporation) should be paying zero on taxes."

On the education front, Verma said, "We need to recruit better teachers and give them a little bit more in pay, with a peer review process."

He said that teachers have told him they object to being forced to coach students to study to pass standardized tests. Students are also being hurt by cuts to Florida's Bright Futures program.

Verma said that college students should not have any interest accruing on their student loans while attending college. He also opposes any proposed cuts in Congress to Pell grants. "Reducing Pell grants takes away access to education," he said.

Verma advocates more funds for stem cell research, because

it has the "potential to cure any disease."

He favors continued support for Medicare, because many seniors "gave up higher salaries to (ensure) getting benefits" after they retired.

The Indian American candidate admitted to **India-West** that he may need significant funding to win a House seat.

"But a lot of people are struggling. I know a campaign costs money." Nonetheless, he pledged to refuse all "corporate money with any strings attached."

He hopes to energize voters by taking his campaign to the people. "I will go to every event and hopefully some people will donate and go out and vote for me on Election Day."

Rep. John L. Mica, R-Winter Park, Fla., who currently represents the 7th District, which includes St. Augustine, Daytona Beach, all of St. Johns and Flagler counties and parts of Seminole and Orange counties, is being drawn out of his current seat under redistricting.

Due to 18 percent population growth in Florida, mainly in the Hispanic community, the state will gain two additional congressional

Attorney Vipin Verma is running on a progressive platform in Daytona Beach, Fla.

seats in 2012. The Florida primary is scheduled for Aug. 14.

In the 2008 presidential election in the district, Senator John Mc-

Cain beat Obama 53 percent to 46 percent and Mica beat the Democratic Party candidate by almost a 7-3 margin.