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The Bureau of Standards Jamaica Launches Groundbreaking Telemedicine Standard

Kingston, Jamaica: The Bureau of Standards Jamaica (BSJ) launched the JS 359:2022 Jamaican Standard Specification for Telemedicine on Thursday, 9 February 2023. Telemedicine is the provision of health and medical care services with the use of information and communication technology; it facilitates long distance patient care; utilizing digital tools such as the computer, smart phone or other devices through video, audio or text.

It was once said that telemedicine is the future of healthcare and with our experience with the global pandemic and the concerns of exposure in public spaces, this would have brought the future starkly into the present. We observed many changes and the thrust towards digitalization would have been one of the primary change observed. The need for technology and innovation became very apparent and people across the world came to the realization that business and work could be carried out from anywhere in the world, once the proper infrastructure is in place to the support the effort.

Dr. Velton Gooden, Executive Director of the BSJ in his remarks stated, “this ground-breaking standard will provide the framework through which telemedicine may be safely practised while upholding the integrity of the medical profession and taking into account the importance of protecting patients’ information” . Mr. Wilfred Baghaloo, Chairman of the BSJ Standards Council stated, “we have a responsibility at the Bureau to make sure that we put standards in place”. The BSJ develops standards to support industry.

“I am very pleased at the pace that we were able to develop the standard and implement it”, he further stated and extended congratulations to the BSJ team and communicated that the BSJ will be pursuing a deliberate mandate to develop more standards this year.

The Honorable Dr. Norman Dunn, Minister of State in the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce in his address stated, “The Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce welcomes this standard particularly, not only because of the far-reaching positive outlook for health care delivery and administration but because it provides yet another opportunity for an injection of investment from forward-thinking medical personnel and investors”.

“I commend the team for its efforts and encourage you to remain alert to trends across the world that will help advance Jamaica’s preparedness to be a major global participant”, said Minister Dunn.

The event saw significant representation from the medical sector and members of several key stakeholder groups were present. Principals of some of these stakeholder groups communicated their endorsement with brief remarks during the programme. These groups included the Medical Council of Jamaica, the Council of Profession Allied to Medicine/UTech, the Jamaica Veterinary Board, The University of the West Indies and the Pharmacy Council of Jamaica.

Professor Winston Davidson, Chairman of the Medical Facilities Technical Committee, the committee responsible for the development of the standard said, “These standards are what we call industry standards; these are standards of the telemedicine industry. I don’t think there is any other county in the world that has developed standards like these and this is therefore a proud moment for Jamaica”. “The Bureau of Standards has developed standards which will now integrate Jamaica’s health services within the global value chain”, said Professor Davidson.

Telemedicine provides benefits of health and convenience. It is anticipated that the utilization of this standard will bridge the information gap regarding remote healthcare best practices, so telemedicine may be safely practiced in Jamaica.

Scope of the Telemedicine Standard

This standard specifies the requirements for the provision of telemedicine services and is applicable to the following:

- a) Provider-patient relationship;
- b) issues of liability and negligence;
- c) evaluation, management, and treatment;
- d) informed consent, continuity of care;
- e) referral for emergency services;
- f) medical records;
- g) privacy and security of patient records and exchange of information,
- h) prescribing and reimbursement,
- i) health education and counselling

This standard does not specify:

- a) hardware, software, building infrastructure, and maintenance used for telemedicine;
- b) information management systems involved in telemedicine; and
- c) digital technology usage to conduct surgical or invasive procedures remotely.

About the BSJ

The Bureau of Standards Jamaica (BSJ), an agency of the Ministry of Industry, Investment, and Commerce is a statutory body established by the Standards Act of 1969 to promote and encourage standardization in relation to commodities, processes, and practices. The BSJ functions as a facilitator of business development and trade which provides services in the areas of Standards Development, Conformity Assessment which involves Testing and Certification (*certification services are provided by the National Certification Body of Jamaica*), Metrology (Calibration and Verification), and Training. The organization also provides support to businesses through its industry/client support programmes.

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