Home Long-Term Oxygen Treatment in Italy

The Additional Value of Telemedicine
As an American, I recently began extending visits to friends in Italy by meeting families providing “agriturismo”. My Italian speaking wife Evi (Eveline Faure, MD, FCCP, a graduate of the Università Italiana per Stranieri, Perugia) made this possible.

During one visit in 1994, we were sitting around the table in Pisa with friends who were fellow critical care physicians. They were remarking how specialists needed more patients. We told them that we were going south beyond Naples, a concept which they could not understand, considering the beauty of Tuscany. We had a marvelous time in southern Italy, meeting warm and welcoming people, surely one of the greatest resources of all Italy.

While in Calabria, I noted there were so many people on the streets joyfully communicating on their cell phones. (This was before cellular technology became so popular in the USA). Evi commented how tele-communication had advanced in Italy; she remembered how it took three hours to make a phone call with a jetton only a few years before. Later, in a small town (Revello, Basilicata), we met a wonderful young family who told us how difficult it was to get medical care. Yes, they had good general physicians, but it was hard to reach specialists many kilometers away. At the time, we were staying on a farm with an elderly couple, who invited us to join them to share meals. During conversation, I learned that the farmer had chronic lung disease and required long-term oxygen. He, too, found it difficult to get the care he needed in rural Italy.

I started to think… specialists up North, need in the South … why not connect by tele-communication??

Many years later, I was introduced to telemedicine. As I traced its world-wide evolution, I was given a trade association report (un-authored) about a well-established program in Verona that used telemedicine for long-term oxygen management of chronic respiratory illness. I included this observation during a Memorial Lecture to honor the late Luciano Pesce, MD, FCCP, in Padua several years later. In the audience sat a gentleman who smiled as I did. Later, he introduced himself to me as Roberto Dal Negro, MD, FCCP. He humbly noted to me that he was grateful that I have acknowledged his team’s work in Verona!

I have followed with admiration the work of Dott. Dal Negro and colleagues in
Veneto ever since. Their extensive experience with outcome analysis is an important demonstration of the value of telemedicine in home care. It would interest all those involved with long-term care for chronic illness (physicians, patients and families, health care organizations and funders, public policy leaders etc.) in Italy and elsewhere. This book is an effort to extend the awareness of their major accomplishment so all can understand the benefit to patients and families around the world.

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