

Interview

# Tonic, a digital health service

STAR HEALTH DESK

The health sector of Bangladesh has come a long way since its independence. Over the last two decades in particular, it has made strong progress in increasing life expectancy, reducing child and maternal mortality rates and decreasing fertility.

Beyond the glitzy private hospitals of Dhaka, Government initiatives have vastly improved the quality and availability of health services in rural areas, through community clinics.

While the progresses made so far has been remarkable, there is still much more to achieve. With changing lifestyle and eating habits non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are becoming a new challenge for the health sector. The rise of NCDs such as diabetes and heart diseases in Bangladesh has been very alarming and is indicative of the challenges ahead.

In this background Telenor Health, a subsidiary of Telenor Group, in association with GrameenPhone, the largest mobile operator of Bangladesh, launched Tonic, a digital health service recently. Sajid Rahman, CEO of Telenor Health was interviewed about Tonic and its services.

**Q: What prompted Telenor to venture into the health sector of Bangladesh?**

**Ans:** Telenor is present in

Bangladesh for almost two decades and part of the country's development process through GrameenPhone. As a technology company we know that digital technology can play an important role in reducing service delivery gaps in many important sectors. Health is one such key areas where mobile and digital technology can make a difference. This promoted us to introduce Tonic in Bangladesh market.

**Q: From what perspective you think health service through mobile will click?**

**Ans:** If you observe the general trend, mobile is becoming the center of our digital life. We now consume most of the information from mobile and started accessing a number of services which use mobile as a platform. We believe this trend will continue and accessing health service through mobile will be a logical choice.

Tonic is also the result of an extensive research and development process that included input from global health experts, local medical practitioners, and everyday people. We aim to be relevant to a broad cross-section of Bangladeshi society and cover a range of wellness and health needs. Therefore we believe that Tonic will work for the people of this country.

**Q: What Tonic is actually going to offer?**

**Ans:** Tonic was developed with



Sajid Rahman, CEO of Telenor Health

two things in mind. First, to provide increased access to healthcare, and second, to provide aspirational education and support for Bangladeshis to proactively combat illness through diet and lifestyle.

Tonic members receive four benefits: "Tonic Jibon" offers tips and information via SMS, web, and Facebook to help members live a healthy life by eating well, staying active, and keeping mentally refreshed on a daily basis; "Tonic Doktor" provides members access to knowledgeable and friendly advice from a doctor with just a phone call, 24 hours a day, seven days a week; "Tonic

Discounts" helps to make hospital care more accessible by extending discounts of up to 40% on different fees at over 50 popular hospitals across Bangladesh; and the "Tonic Cash" service offers members BDT 500 in cash to assist in covering costs if they are hospitalised for three nights or more.

Any GrameenPhone customer can join Tonic for free via USSD at \*789#, online at www.mytonic.com, by calling 789 or by visiting their local GP retailer. A user only needs to join once, however, to retain membership for the next month a member must simply use his/her GrameenPhone SIM

for a chargeable phone call, SMS, or data pack.

Tonic Jibon content, access to Tonic Discounts, and Tonic Cash coverage is completely free for members. The Tonic Doktor service is available at an affordable rate of BDT 5 per minute plus taxes.

**Q: Don't you think medical consultation over phone is a bit risky?**

**Ans:** GrameenPhone was first to introduce a medical helpline in Bangladesh and running the service without problem ever since; Tonic Doktor is going to take the service to a new height. As the name suggests, all our doctors are registered physicians and certified from reputed medical colleges of our country. They are following a strict medical protocol when providing consultation to our members. We however always direct our members to nearby hospitals in case of emergency cases. Tonic Doktor aims to bridge the gap where a person needs to talk to a doctor but do not have access to one. We believe this will significantly improve access to health care in the market.

**Q: How many hospitals and doctors are involved in Tonic?**

**Ans:** Tonic has partnership with over 50 popular hospitals in the country where Tonic members will get up to 40% discount in fees and get other services. We will continue to expand this partnership.

KID'S IFTAR

## Prepare proper iftar for your kid

PROF M KARIM KHAN

Aninda is a seven years old boy. Couple of days ago he started fasting. This was his first fasting in life. So various types of iftar were being prepared by his mother and grandmother. They all took iftar in a festive mood. But following iftar Aninda had abdominal pain and few episodes of vomiting.

On the following morning Aninda developed acute watery diarrhoea. Following few episodes of diarrhoea Aninda developed some signs of dehydration and distended abdomen. Distension of the abdomen was a bit unusual. His parents took him to nearby hospital. His electrolytes examination revealed that his potassium level has decreased too much and that is why he has developed paralytic ileus. Aninda got admitted in hospital and was given intravenous cholera saline and orally potassium solution. After couple of days stay in hospital he became alright.

Traditional iftar that we take after a long day fasting often is not very ideal for kids. So special attention for them is very important. Plenty of drinking water, hygienically prepared home made sweet lemon beverage to be given to maintain hydration and for correction of hypoglycemia, one or two dates and some fresh fruits should be included in iftar.

Normal family food may be offered two to three hours after iftar. Very strict hygiene to be maintained and preferably all foods should be fresh. Fruits are to be washed with drinking water for a longer period.

Take care of your beloved kids and pay due attention to their foods.

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## HEALTH bulletin

### 'Bath daily' advice for eczema children

If your child has eczema it is fine to give them a dunk in the bath every day, as long as you apply lots of moisturising emollient cream to their skin afterwards, say US researchers.

Some experts have said infrequent washing might be better because too much washing can dry out the skin. They say while it is best to avoid too much soap, a daily soak is fine.

A proviso to the advice is to "smear" after you have gently pat dried, meaning slap on plenty of moisturising lotion after the bath to seal in the moisture. Bathing can remove surface dirt, irritants and allergens.

Applying specially-designed moisturiser immediately afterwards keeps the skin soft and moist, which will help avoid problems such as infections and dry, cracked skin, they explain in the journal Annals of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology.

Parents should use their own judgment as well. If daily bathing does not appear to help their child's eczema, or they would rather not do it, they can switch to less frequent baths or showers. If their child's condition gets worse they should seek their doctor's advice.

**Soak and smear**

- Use lukewarm water - it is more soothing than hot water, which can sting
- Avoid harsh soaps. Instead use "sparing" amounts of a pH balanced skin cleanser
- Do not scrub the skin clean, wash it gently
- Towel dry by gently patting
- Apply emollient immediately after this - emollients are not the same as cosmetic moisturisers and are designed to be used for skin conditions, such as eczema.

## New checklist to make health estimates more acceptable

Reliable statistics are vital in many areas of life - none more so than in public health, when knowing how many people die of or are made sick by particular diseases is essential for policymakers and planners to make the best decisions about how to prevent suffering and save lives.

Nothing beats counting individual cases and deaths. But many countries lack the resources and infrastructure to gather good quality data, and data are often missing for certain populations and time periods. Countries sometimes count in different ways, making comparisons problematic.

To fill those gaps, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other researchers calculate estimates

of health data based on complex methods, sometimes using indicators such as gross domestic product and education that are known to be drivers of health outcomes, as well as comparable data from other countries in the same region or with similar characteristics.

Here is the problem: around the world, different statisticians use different ways of calculating estimates, with (unsurprisingly) different results. And they haven't always shared all the details on how they arrive at their estimates; there has been no agreement on how to disclose methodologies.

The Guidelines for Accurate and Transparent Health Estimates Reporting, or GATHER, is a checklist

of 18 best practices that sets the standard for disclosing how health estimates are developed. The GATHER checklist was developed by WHO and researchers from around the world including the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington in Seattle, and was published in the Lancet and PLOS Medicine.

GATHER includes requirements for disclosing which data are used to calculate estimates, and for making them available to others. It also includes a requirement to disclose how the computer code used to crunch the numbers can be accessed, making it possible for others to reproduce estimates, making them more robust.

Both WHO and IHME have agreed to comply with GATHER when they publish new global health estimates. Journals including the Lancet, PLOS Medicine, the International Journal of Epidemiology and the Bulletin of the World Health Organization plan to ask authors to comply with GATHER, and it is expected that other journals to follow suit.

GATHER will also help researchers to be more efficient and make better use of research funds; greater transparency will enable researchers to build on the work done by others, instead of wasting months or even years of work trying to reproduce it.



The date fruit is one of the sweetest fruits around and also happens to come in many different varieties. They can be eaten fresh or dry. The health benefits of dates are plentiful.

- **Promoting digestive health:** The insoluble and soluble fiber found in dates help to clean out the gastrointestinal system, allowing the colon to work at greater levels of efficiency.
- **Boosting heart health:** In addition to promoting colon health, fiber is also known to boost heart health.
- **Anti-inflammatory:** Dates are rich in magnesium - a mineral known for its anti-inflammatory benefits. Inflammation in the arterial walls was also reduced with magnesium intake.
- **Reduced blood pressure:** Magnesium has been shown to help lower blood pressure - and again, dates are full of the mineral. Additionally, potassium is another mineral in dates aiding with the proper workings of the heart and helping to reduce blood pressure.
- **Reduced stroke risk:** After evaluating 7 studies published over a 14 year time period, researchers found stroke risk was reduced by 9% for every 100 milligrams of magnesium a person consumes per day.
- **Boosting brain health:** Sufficient vitamin B6 levels are associated with improved brain performance and better test scores. Dates are abundant in vitamin B6.



## Giardiasis (gee-ar-dye-a-sis) is an infection of the digestive system caused by tiny parasites called Giardia intestinalis (also known as Giardia lamblia, or Giardia duodenalis)

Diarrhoea is the most common symptom of giardiasis.

Other symptoms can include:

- Abdominal cramps
- Foul-smelling flatulence and belching
- Nausea (feeling sick)
- Bloating
- Indigestion
- Fatigue (extreme tiredness)
- Dehydration
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss caused by malnutrition

Giardiasis occurs almost everywhere in the world, but is particularly widespread where access to clean water is limited and sanitation is poor.

It can affect people of all ages but is most common in young children and their parents. This is because things like nappy changing increase the risk of infection.

