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Resilient

Mobile health workers provide healthcare in Romanian rural areas



SUMMARY

The Doctors' Caravan Association (Caravana cu Medici) is an NGO comprising doctors and medical students delivering complementary medical services in rural areas across Romania. Since its establishment in 2014, the association has been enhancing healthcare accessibility within remote regions.

Its approach combines mobile units staffed with a multidisciplinary team, operational during weekends, alongside a telemedicine platform and a call centre designed to assist those facing challenges with online access. Diverse types of caravans are deployed to address specific needs. Each caravan can cater to up to 100 people daily. By 2023, over 150 caravans had been deployed and more than 14 000 patients in rural Romania had benefited from their services.



CONTEXT

The Romanian medical system faces the serious challenge of limited access to healthcare services in rural areas. Approximately 46% of Romania's 19 million inhabitants reside in rural areas, yet the bulk of medical professionals and infrastructure is located in urban centres, resulting in significant deficiencies in rural communities.

OBJECTIVES

The association's key objectives are to provide basic and advanced medical care, perform screening and diagnostic tests, and raise awareness of the importance of prevention and a healthy lifestyle among rural residents.

Theme(s): Access to services; Transport and mobility; Health and care

Country: Romania

Organisation: Caravana cu Medici, non-profit organisation

Start & end date: 06/2014 – ongoing

Budget: EUR 20 000 / caravan / 100 patients

Funding sources:

- Private funding
- Donations
- Corporate social responsibility from private companies and social programmes
- Local authorities

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ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The association's team, composed of doctors, medical residents and students, **travels to rural and remote areas, offering a wide array of medical services.** These range from basic to advanced screenings and diagnostic procedures, including clinical examinations, blood tests, blood pressure monitoring, as well as abdominal and cardiac ultrasounds. Following assessment, patients are provided with medical guidance, treatment or referrals for follow-up.

Operating mainly on weekends, the team uses mobile health units or available local spaces, such as general practice clinics, schools and town halls, transformed into temporary healthcare circuits. A team of 10 physicians and 10 medical students **evaluates around 100 patients daily.**

The association **provides services related to general healthcare, paediatrics and female healthcare,** including breast ultrasounds and gynaecology. This defines three types of caravan, according to the function.

Services include general assessments of residents' health, managing risks related to prevalent diseases, advanced medical screening and diagnostic tests, individualised treatment plans, and facilitating follow-up and coordination with family doctors and specialists at nearby healthcare facilities. The team also provides basic health information and advice, promotes preventive medicine and monitors treatment results. The association further performs statistical analyses and produces reports based on assessment findings.



RESULTS

- > **Over 200 medical caravans have provided free medical assistance to over 30 000 beneficiaries,** both adults and children, between 2014 and 2023.
- > Five city branches in Bucharest, Iasi, Cluj, Brasov and Oradea, established through a robust volunteer network of doctors, medical students and other personnel, aiming to achieve national coverage and enhance healthcare accessibility across rural Romania.
- > Implementation of an electronic medical record and telemedicine platform enabling a **complete digitalisation of medical procedures,** easing access to medical services and subsequent patient follow-up. This includes: uploading of personalised medical examination files tailored to each specialty; automatic uploading of blood tests; medical history compilation; telemedicine consultations; and a medical education platform.
- > **Free medical services** through volunteering of all participating doctors and funding from various private sources and corporate social responsibility programmes. The association is actively pursuing a model to integrate its services with the National Health Insurance House, aiming to improve healthcare accessibility for all rural residents.
- > Adoption of a **Mobile Healthcare Act** by the Romanian Parliament in March 2022 – an entirely new chapter in the country's healthcare law – comprising 20 articles that outline healthcare provision through mobile health services and medical caravans. This was achieved through legislative advocacy by the association since 2019 to address the lack of a definition of mobile health services in Romanian legislation. This advocacy included raising awareness of the model and campaigning for legislative measures to regulate the caravan of healthcare providers, highlighting the cost-effectiveness of the model compared to establishing clinics.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

Mobile healthcare is a pioneering approach in the delivery of medical services, introducing a paradigm shift through bringing the medical system directly to patients in regions where medical infrastructure is scarce.

The association offers a range of services such as prevention, prophylaxis, screening for prevalent medical conditions, and regular general or specialised medical check-ups, complementing the services of general practitioners or family medicine practitioners.

The association's mobile healthcare model is a promising solution for residents in rural and remote areas. By leveraging this approach, the association offers a **more efficient means of providing primary prevention and healthcare services,** improving the overall accessibility to crucial medical services for those in need.

