The telegraph and the beginnings of telemedicine in Australia

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The Tyranny of Distance
Image of G. Blainey - The Age

Communications Technologies - from 1780s

1879


1876

• Mr Watson - come here, I want you.
1860s - telegraph
- American Civil War
  - Care of wounded
  - Arranging transport


The tyranny of distance


Getting the news

The newspapers of the 1860s as a fledgling of newspapers in America, Australia, and England were suddenly covered in 1872. The quickest way of bringing news from Australia and the world had arrived from the east. The coastal towns bore telegraphy soon after the entrance to Australia. Telegraphs had sprung from the first areas of the world. The telegraph reached Australia in 1848, and newspapers there were printed in London and Sydney. The newspapers of the 1860s were printed in London and Sydney, and the newspapers of the 1870s were printed in London and Sydney.

Charles Todd - Astronomer and Superintendent of Telegraphs, 1855.

The Barrow Creek incident

Sunday 22nd February, 1874

This Station has been attacked by natives at 8. Stapleton has been mortally wounded, one of the men, named John Franks, just died from wounds. Civilised Native Boy has had three spear wounds. Mr Flint, assistant operator one spear wound in leg, not serious. Full particulars in morning.

James Stapleton

- After four years at the Katherine River station, he was travelling on the 2,000 mile journey to Adelaide for a reunion with his wife and four young children.
- At Barrow Creek he found the resident stationmaster seriously ill, so he sent him on to the city for treatment and elected to occupy his position until a replacement could be organised.

Monday 23rd February, 1874

- "... We are informed by Mr. Told that during Sunday night Dr. Charles Gosse at his request attended at the Telegraph Office and gave instruction as to the proper treatment of the wounded!"

Monday 23rd February, 1874

- "... and up to about 11 o'clock all were progressing favorably. Later in the day, however, a change for the worse took place in Mr. Stapleton's condition, and notwithstanding all the aid that it was possible to render him, he sank under the effect of his injuries, and died, very quietly, at a quarter to 6 o'clock in the evening."

Monday 23rd February, 1874

- Jimmy Darcy - internal injuries after fall from horse.
- Taken to Fred Tuckett - telegraphist at Halls Creek, who had some 1st aid training.
- Dr John Holland in Kalgoorlie diagnosed rupture of urethra.
- Operation needed.
- Conducted by Tucker using morphia, pocket knife and razor, under instruction over Morse code.

Remote WA - 13th August, 1917
RFDS - 1929

- Inspiration for John Flynn to set up the RFDS in 1929
- Alfred Traeger - engineer and experimenter in Adelaide
- Developed the pedal-powered wireless
- 1932 - keyboard

The beginnings - what could be done

- Advice for the wounded
- Care for the family
- Remote surgery

Today...

Necessity is the mother of invention

- Our situations encourage us to innovate
- The most basic means of telecommunication can be used for telemedicine
- Use what you have at your disposal - people, networks, equipment

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