

John Dalli

Member of the European Commission, responsible for Health and Consumer Policy

Commissioner Dalli delivers speech at the Annual Meeting of the Global eHealth Ambassadors' Programme (GeHAP)

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

John DALLI, European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, attends GeHAP Annual Meeting

Lisbon, Portugal, 25 June 2012

Global eHealth Ambassadors' Programme (GeHAP)

Ambassadors Annual Meeting, 25 June 2012

Monday, 25 June 2012, 10:00 hrs

Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, Portugal

Archbishop Tutu,

Ministers, Ambassadors,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to be here with you today at this important gathering of the eHealth Ambassadors Programme.

Your initiative shows admirable foresight. I wholeheartedly share your enthusiasm as regards the potential of eHealth – towards delivering better, safer and more efficient healthcare to citizens across the world. eHealth is indeed a main pillar on which to build our action to achieve equality in health.

eHealth is already making a difference. However, even in developed countries, it calls for substantial human and capital investment in order to turn its promise into reality.

Allow me to set out the main developments as regards eHealth in the European Union.

If we want eHealth to function, we need efficient and reliable transfer of appropriate electronic data across the

EU. Such data needs to follow patients when they travel across Europe.

If we fall ill when away from home, medical services need to have the right technology, infrastructure and authority to gain access to our electronic medical records.

This calls for appropriate security measures to protect our data; it also calls for electronic systems to be compatible with one another.

To find solutions to overcome these challenges, I have set up a voluntary eHealth Network that brings together all the 27 European Union Member States. This network is working on exchange of data across borders; on semantics and interoperability; and is developing ways to enable the use of health data for medical research.

For example, the network will agree on a minimum set of information that needs to be on an electronic record; so that such records can be used across the European Union.

Patient registries, pooling data on the monitoring of patients with a specific disease, are a promising eHealth application. They can help improve treatment for a given disease; or even help develop a new cure.

For example, researchers seeking to understand how a rare disease unfolds, and which treatment works best, need to be able to rely on a critical mass of patient registries.

What they often find, however, is fragmented registries in different countries, with incompatible data. This puts a brake on medical research.

This is why I have brought together a large group of Member States in a Joint Action on Patient Registries.

This group will look at how existing registries are shaped, and develop best practice guidance for creating a new registry that works across borders.

Another example is electronic prescriptions, which can improve patient safety by eliminating human error.

EU citizens have the right to get medicines on prescription anywhere in the EU regardless of the country where the prescription was issued. In reality, however, it does not always work.

To address this situation, the European Commission is working together with Member States with a view to adopting measures on the content of cross-border prescriptions. For example, to ensure that the doctor, and the medicine prescribed are identified clearly and in a consistent manner across the EU.

All this eHealth technology, inter-operability and the freeing up data are very important. However, they are only the tip of the iceberg.

eHealth promises so much more – the very beginning of a new era in healthcare.

The success of eHealth calls for a revolution in healthcare as we know it – a re-engineering of health systems – changing the way health systems are organised; changing the role of the doctor; changing the role of the patient.

This requires defining new tasks, new skills, defining new ways of financing, cost sharing, risk-sharing.

Let's look, for instance, at devices for patients to monitor their chronic condition from home.

This is an important eHealth application – a key means to move some health services from hospital to home; and, at the same time, increase life quality and reduce hospital dependency.

The number of such devices and mobile applications is growing.

There is for example a company in Germany that is developing free applications for reading and managing vital data through the mobile phone of patients.

Patients have access to their vital data at all places and times, and they can get feedback from their doctor by e-mail after each measurement.

I believe we also need to explore IT Push systems in health, like proactive routines that analyse and compare patients' conditions and test-values; anticipate conditions and diseases emerging: and automatically inform – push - the doctor or nurse in charge.

Another example is an eHealth system developed in Denmark that manages hospital intensive care units, helping to reduce treatment costs up to 30%, while increasing patient safety.

One does not need to go to Germany or Denmark to see eHealth deliver results.

I hear that right here in Portugal, since 2008, five hospitals and nineteen health centres in the region of Alentejo are delivering telemedicine services in a wide range of specialisations including cardiology and diabetes.

I also hear about hospitals being inter-connected with other Portuguese hospitals – or even with hospitals as far away as Angola or Cape Verde in Africa – to deliver tele consultations to people who would otherwise not have access to specialised health services. This is solidarity in concrete terms.

Of course eHealth applications cost money. We therefore need to evaluate carefully the cost benefit of eHealth tools.

This is why the EU currently supports the project Renewing health, to establish a methodology to assess eHealth services. This kind of evaluation is crucial to identify when and where eHealth solutions can contribute to more effective health systems.

One of the greatest benefits of eHealth – one which is priceless – is that it can empower patients to take more control over their health.

Providing citizens with access to their personal health data together with improving their health literacy; enables them to make well informed choices about their health and treatment.

This also entails profound changes as regards the role of the different actors in health – a real cultural shift.

Health professionals have a key role to play in the uptake of eHealth. However, some may show resistance towards what they perceive as a loss of control; the need to liaise with patients from distance; or the need to acquire new skills.

That is why health professionals need to be fully on board in the progressive development of eHealth.

To turn all these actions into reality it is important to have a long term strategy. In this context, the European Commission will launch a new eHealth Action Plan by the end of this year.

The aim of this Action Plan is to support Member States to achieve patient-centred, cost-effective healthcare in a competitive and innovation-friendly environment.

The new eHealth Action Plan seeks to mobilise innovative ICT for:

Empowering people to manage their own health;

Enabling health professionals to make the best use of limited resources;

Keeping people at home as much and as long as possible while ensuring necessary care;

Making better use of the wealth of information available within the healthcare systems.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To conclude, making eHealth a reality requires vision and commitment to push forward a revolution in healthcare systems.

There is no single easy path to eHealth transformation. Much value comes from sharing experiences and best practices between countries, institutions and professionals.

The Ambassadors' Programme boosts the global dimension of eHealth and makes a valuable contribution towards its future success.

I believe that that today's global dialogue will bring us closer to the solutions which are expected by citizens and patients, from across the world.

Thank you.