Recent policy developments in the area of eHealth

Member States have been increasingly recognising the potential of eHealth for improving accessibility, quality and efficiency of healthcare services. This is particularly reflected in the declarations issued at Ministerial eHealth conferences since 2003.

The Commission eHealth Communication and Action plan of 2004[1], the Communication on Telemedicine (November 2008)[2], the Recommendation on cross-border interoperability of electronic health record systems[3] (July 2008) and the proposed Directive on the Application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare[4] provide the relevant framework and encouragement for pro-active cooperation on eHealth among Member States.

At present, several joint initiatives involving the majority of Member States are under way, in particular the epSOS large-scale pilot, which aims at developing, testing and validating in real life settings cross border interoperability of patient's summaries and ePrescription solutions[5] and the CALLIOPE thematic network.[6]

On February 18th 2009, 24 national delegations represented at State Secretary (and/or Director General) level met in Prague alongside the eHealth Conference 2009 and agreed that cooperation at high political level between Member States should be deepened and adequately formalised. The Commission welcomed this initiative and expressed its support and is exploring with Member States and the upcoming Swedish Presidency ways to implement it.

Further work ahead

Continuous support of research, and launch of studies and reports:
- 1st quarter 2009: Launch of the Study "Methodologies to assess telemedicine applications";
- 1st quarter 2009: Launch of the Study "Monitoring eHealth Strategies: lessons learned, trends and good practice cases";
- 2nd quarter 2009: Call 4 of the seventh framework programme (FP7) Information and Communication Technology (ICT) stream, Challenge 5 "Towards sustainable and personalised healthcare";
- 2nd quarter 2009: Call 3 of the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP) ICT Policy Support Programme, theme 1 "ICT for health, ageing and inclusion";
- 2nd Quarter 2009: Staff Working Paper "Telemedicine for the benefits of patients, healthcare systems and society" (to follow up on the Commission Communication);
- 4th quarter 2009: Publication of the Commission Staff Working Paper on the analysis of Community law applicable to telemedicine services;
- 2010: Publication of Commission Report on Consistent assessment of the impact of telemedicine solutions including effectiveness and cost-effectiveness.

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[1] "e-Health - making healthcare better for European citizens: An action plan for a European e-Health Area" COM (2004) 356 final.

[2] Communication on 'Telemedicine for the benefit of patients, healthcare systems and society' COM(2008)689 final.

[3] Recommendation on Cross-border interoperability of electronic health record systems REC(2008)3282 final.

[4] The Commission Communication on 'Rare Diseases: Europe's challenges' COMM(2008) 679 final (http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_threats/non_com/docs/rare_com_en.pdf) also refers to e-health as a priority policy in the area of rare diseases.

[5] European Patients Smart Open Service Programme' (epSOS) www.epsos.eu

[6] CALLfor InterOPErability, www.calliope.eu

<u>Reinforcing Member States and stakeholder cooperation:</u>
- Regular i2010 sub-group on eHealth meetings in 2009;
- 3rd quarter 2009: Set up of a European Platform to support Member States in sharing information on current national legislative frameworks relevant to telemedicine and proposals for new regulations;
- 3rd quarter 2009: First meeting with Member States representatives (i2010 subgroup on eHealth) to prepare the Report on the progress in implementing the Commission Recommendation on Cross-border interoperability of electronic health record systems;
- 3rd quarter 2009: The European Commission (DG SANCO and DG INFSO jointly) will further expand existing cooperation mechanisms with stakeholders (including patient and health professionals) to produce specific recommendations on how to improve confidence in and acceptance of eHealth (especially telemedicine), also taking into account ethical and privacy related aspects;
- 2nd semester 2009: The upcoming Swedish presidency is also interested in taking the issue of cooperation on eHealth further forward and discussions on possible actions are underway;
- March 2010: eHealth Ministerial Conference, back-to-back with the World of Health IT.

<u>Within the scope of the Commission Lead Market Initiative[7]:</u>
- 1st quarter 2009: Launch of study on business models for eHealth;
- 1st quarter 2009: Report on "Economic Impact of Electronic Health Records and ePrescription" to be published and results disseminated;
- 1st quarter 2009: Launch of DG INFSO-JRC study on "Strategic Intelligence Monitor on Personal Health Systems" (SIM PHS), 1st experts workshop;
- 2nd quarter 2009: Launch of thematic network aiming to propose a procedure for EU-wide labelling and certification of Electronic Health Record systems;
- 4th quarter 2009: Launch of thematic network of procurers of eHealth services;
- Ongoing support to definition of required standards for interoperable eHealth systems and legal clarity for eHealth services.

<u>Future directions and objectives to pursue:</u>
- Support the "eHealth Governance Initiative" aimed at facilitating cooperation between Member States to deploy eHealth services and achieve interoperability. Such cooperation could be formalised through a High level group (composed of Member States representatives at State Secretary or equivalent level) to provide political and strategic guidance to achieve these objectives. Such group would need administrative support to ensure that its activities are efficiently and timely prepared and followed up;
- Set up a technical group consisting of Member States representatives, experts in the relevant domain, as it would be needed to discuss and agree on technical guidelines to support eHealth interoperability and deployment and to provide the technical input to implement any policy decisions decided by the eHealth Governance;
- The Commission is willing to provide the necessary support (administrative and/or technical) to such political cooperation;
- Promote the inclusion of eHealth in the context of Member States healthcare reforms and EU co-financed investment programmes;
- Promote eHealth acceptance and training actions for health professionals and patients;
- Promote Member States action to bring additional clarity regarding reimbursement issues, medical terminologies and technical standards, as well as on mainstreaming eHealth within their health systems and on involving health professionals and patients in eHealth strategies.

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[7] Communication "A lead market initiative for Europe" COM(2007)860 (21.12.2007)