

Cross-Border medical assistance

– interoperability of eHealth services



European eHealth initiatives to support medical assistance while travelling and living abroad

Patients' rights and medical assistance

On July 2, the European Commission released, as part of the Renewed Social Agenda, two documents with significant importance to supporting cross-border healthcare delivery.

The awaited proposal for a "Directive on patients' rights in cross-border healthcare" aims at clarification of the legal rights of patients to healthcare abroad and opens the way for reinforced cooperation between Member States (http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_overview/co_operation/healthcare/cross-border_healthcare_en.htm).

The "Recommendation on cross-border interoperability of electronic health record (EHR) systems" provides Member States with basic principles and guidelines for ensuring that vital information on patients is accessible anywhere at any time throughout Europe – no matter where the patient or doctor are based (http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/document.cfm?action=display&doc_id=510).

The European Commission has a track record of consistently funding an important number of projects which prepared the conceptual groundwork of cross-border and interoperable healthcare delivery. Key among them are:

RIDE - A Roadmap for Interoperability of eHealth Systems (www.srdc.metu.edu.tr),

SemanticHealth - Semantic Interoperability RTD roadmap (<http://www.semantichealth.org>),

eHealth ERA - Towards the establishment of a European eHealth Research Area (www.ehealth-era.org).

i2-Health - Interoperability Initiative for a European eHealth Area (<http://www.i2-health.eu>),

TEN4Health - Trans-European healthcare support network for Europe's mobile citizens (<http://www.ten4health.eu>).

With a view to making the European Commission's activities in cross-border healthcare known to a wider audience, several workshops are being organised by the projects to gather the expertise in the field as well as to validate research and deployment perspectives. Two recent examples are: SemanticHealth - during May 2008, where initial results and recommendations for the domains of Electronic Health Record Systems, Ontologies and Terminologies, Public Health and Socio-Economic issues were presented for discussion, further refinement and validation - (<http://www.semantichealth.org/pubdoc.html>); and the TEN4Health project that organised a workshop on 9 September 2008 at the "eHealth Conference 2008" in Kiel, Germany. Several ICT-supported solutions for borderless healthcare from Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and the Baltic states were presented and discussed, followed by a debate on the likely implications of the Commission's proposal for a directive on patients' rights. The workshop was opened by a representative from the European Commission and Dr. Milan Cabrnock, Member of the European Parliament.

Pan-European cooperation

Besides these local examples of cross-border cooperation, there is also progress on the pan-European level. A very recent example of European progress in eHealth-supported cross-border healthcare delivery is the Smart Open Services (S.O.S.) project. (<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/1075&format=PDF&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>). Co-funded by the E.C. through its Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP) (http://ec.europa.eu/cip/index_en.htm), it was initiated by 12 Member States and a European industry consortium. The new project will lay the groundwork for compatibility of electronic patient information regardless of language or sophistication of technology, without having to establish a common system throughout Europe.

Making the different Member States' eHealth systems communicate better between each other will help doctors receiving a foreign patient to get a correct general picture of the patient's medical history in order to safely diagnose and prescribe proper medication.

This will enable health professionals to quickly and electronically access selected vital data of a patient from another country, in their own

language, using their usual technology systems. It will also make it possible for pharmacies to electronically process prescriptions from other Member States, so that, for example, patients travelling within the EU can obtain a refill of essential medicine. It will allow health professionals to access specific medical data such as current medications, allergies, chronic conditions or blood disorders of patients from other EU countries.

At the same time, the S.O.S project will also ensure that electronic health solutions are compatible from one country to the other around Europe including security of the personal health data and identification of the people accessing them.

In addition, the CALLIOPE network (15 other EU Member States not participating to S.O.S) and European representatives of key healthcare stakeholders will also contribute to implementing interoperability in Europe. Its main objectives include the elaboration of a common Interoperability roadmap; review and advancement of the EC Interoperability Recommendation and; facilitation of pre-standardisation processes through liaison with Standards Development Organisations. CALLIOPE will also provide an expert platform to discuss the findings and the results of SOS, ensuring that these can be shared with non-participant countries and the wider healthcare community.



Important Links:

eHealth Policy page: http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/health/policy
eHealth Projects: http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/health/research
ICT Policy Support Programme: http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/ict_psp
ICT for Health ICT-PSP projects:
http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/health/cip_ict_psp/index_en.htm

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