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## Blog by Neelie Kroes about eHealth

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[1]

Vice President and Commissioner Neelie Kroes (Digital Agenda for Europe) wrote a blog (in Dutch) about eHealth. It was published on the Artsennet website, a Dutch news site for doctors.

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**Date:**

26/06/2013

Here is a translation of the blog:

June 26, 2013

### Healthcare goes digital

People today are living longer - and you as a doctor are playing your part to help this. It is of course very positive news: but it also creates new challenges.

Our health system is under constant pressure, and increasingly dealing with chronic and degenerative diseases; while doctors are so busy and only have limited resources available. The answer may lie in ICT (information and communications technology) for health and wellbeing - known as "eHealth".

### Telemedicine

Currently at the European Commission, we are analysing a study about the use of ICT by doctors in Europe, including the Netherlands. And you know what it shows? Although GPs are constantly behind their computer, we are far from making a reality of "telemedicine" - patient-doctor contact via digital technology.

Yet research shows that telemedicine, and eHealth in general, has a lot of advantages: for example, access to healthcare becomes much easier for the patient—especially important for chronically ill patients who live in remote areas. And you'll save time and therefore costs, because many things -

making appointments, sharing lab reports, etc. - can be organised much faster and more efficiently when digitised. It is also safer for the patient because the medical process is much more visible for all doctors involved – whether GPs or specialists.

## Privacy

At European level we are working to get digital health services "interoperable", and resolving legal issues. For example, our [Staff Working Document on Telemedicine](#) [2] which highlights European rules on patient privacy: namely, that medical data may only be processed by health professionals who are bound by confidentiality; and only when the patient has given explicit consent. The doctor also has to inform the patient why the medical data are being shared and with whom, and - very importantly - that patients themselves are allowed to access their data.

Yet these rules are being applied differently in each Member State. So the Commission has proposed that data, including medical records, be regularised at European level – a proposal still currently under discussion.

So there is enough work to do! And that's even before talking about mHealth (the "m" is for mobile). As set out in our "[eHealth Action Plan 2012-2020](#) [3]", we're planning a Green Paper on the huge growth of health and wellbeing apps for smartphones and tablets. Like this, we intend to start a discussion together with EU Member States about the opportunity to regulate these apps better – and possibly give the publishers of such apps a code of conduct.

And much more is possible in the field of eHealth. As so often, the right tools are in the hands of others. Like yours [the doctors who read Arstennet] for example, to give a [price](#) [4] for good medical apps!

Neelie Kroes,

Vice-president of the European Commission and Commissioner of the Digital Agenda for Europe

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[4] <http://www.artsennet.nl/Kennisbank/Health-app-award-2013.htm>

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