Volume 15, Issue 1, 2013 - News

European eHealth Action Plan

The European Commission's latest eHealth initiative, the "eHealth Action Plan 2012-2020 - Innovative healthcare for the 21st century", builds on the foundations of the 2004-2012 plan, and sets out ambitious measures for implementing eHealth across the EU with the slogan of "lifting barriers to smarter, safer, patient-centred health services."

Launched in December 2012, the plan provides a long-term vision for eHealth in Europe, and focuses on the steps for wider delivery of eHealth throughout the Member States and across borders. eHealth is seen as the key to sustainable health systems for the future. It has widereaching applicability in healthcare systems: interaction between patients and health-service providers, institution-toinstitution data transmission, and peerto- peer communication between patients and/or health professionals.

Progress has been made since the first eHealth action plan of 2004, notably the European Patients Smart Open System (epSOS). Barriers to further development include lack of awareness and confidence in eHealth solutions, lack of interoperability, limited evidence of effectiveness, legal and privacy concerns, high start-up costs, and variation in access.

The Action Plan's objectives are to achieve wider interoperability of eHealth services; support research, development and innovation in eHealth and wellbeing to address the lack of availability of user -friendly tools and services, facilitate uptake and ensure wider deployment of eHealth.

Against a background of budget cuts, ageing populations, increasing chronic health conditions, increased mobility and rising patient expectations healthcare ICT offers great promise for a smart, sustainable healthcare system. Uptake of healthcare ICT, particularly for patient access, has been patchy. A 2010 survey of hospitals in Europe showed that 81% have one or more electronic patient records systems in place, but only 4% grant patients online access to their health information. 71% use online eBooking systems for patients' appointments with medical staff but only 8% offer patients the opportunity to book their appointment online. 43% of hospitals exchange radiology reports electronically, but only 30% use ePrescription for medicines, 8% telemonitor patients at home, and 5% have some form of electronic exchange of clinical care information with healthcare providers in other EU countries.

eHealth has already shown promise. A recent study across The Netherlands, UK and Germany found that home telemonitoring systems could improve survival rates by 15%, bring a 26% reduction in hospital days per patient and make 10% overall cost savings through nurse telephone support.

Tonio Berg, European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy says: "eHealth solutions form a key element in developing "smarter healthcare" – greater access, more efficient services, and higher quality, with greater patient involvement."

Neelie Kroes, EC Vice-President, says: "Digital technology is there to help us change. Whether it's remote monitoring that lets you be cared for at home, robots to help around the house, or simply mobile apps that empower you to take control of your own healthcare."

The eHealth network set up in 2011 will be responsible for drawing up an interoperability framework for crossborder health services and guidelines on eHealth, including a dataset for patient summary records to be exchanged across borders and measures for interoperable electronic identification and authentication, enhanced security of health information and interoperability of databases for medicinal products.

In addition it is proposed that by 2014, the Commission will adopt a Green Paper on mHealth and health and wellbeing applications. Research and innovation will be supported in several areas, including personalised and predictive medicine, innovations for analytics, diagnostics and decision making, web and mobile technologies and applications, and eHealth systems and services with strong user involvement, focusing on interoperability and the integration of emerging patient-centric technologies for cost-effective healthcare.

For more information, see http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/news/putting-patients-drivingseat-digital-future-healthcare

Published on : Fri, 22 Mar 2013