

Position Paper 'eHealth'

Executive Summary

The challenge of eHealth is to contribute to good health care. Using eHealth is necessary to keep good quality health care affordable and accessible in the future. An increasingly ageing society and advances in medical technology will intensify pressure on labour market for care providers.

In the face of these problems, countries all over the world have embraced health IT as a critical component of health care reform and innovation strategies. Nevertheless, it is difficult to implement the right IT solutions in health care because not only technical interventions, but also cultural changes are needed in the organization of the care process. The impact of health IT on citizens will be massive: a breakthrough will occur in the organization of health care, in which the central position of patients within the care process will be essential. This is the key to delivering high quality health care, improving patient outcomes, controlling health care costs and empowering patients.

The general objective of the eHealth track is to create a worldwide platform for sharing experiences that improve IT applications in health care, with the aim of contributing to good health.

The context of the track is structured along three lines:

- Conditions and use of the information society
- IT-applications in the health care process
- (Re-)use of data

All stakeholders are responsible for accelerating innovation and eHealth. Public-private partnerships are therefore essential. eHealth affects not only health, but life in general.

An Introduction to eHealth

The health care sector is changing. As a result, there are several challenges and societal problems that the sector has to deal with in the near future:

- Aging of the world population
- Growing numbers of people with (multiple) chronic diseases
- Growing pressure on care providers / professionals
- Increasing health care costs
- Changing role of the patient
- Cultural shift within the health care sector

eHealth is becoming more and more significant in overcoming the *challenges of change* in the future of health care. Countries all over the world have embraced health IT as a critical component of health care reform. We agree that IT is central to delivering high quality health care, improving patient outcomes and controlling health care costs.

However, in order to achieve widespread adoption of IT in health care and use the opportunities of health IT, multiple actors in the health care sector, with competing interests, must be brought together to work towards a common goal.

We have to take care of tomorrow: to collaborate, use our own expertise and create innovative solutions in order to keep health care in the future *accessible to all, reasonably priced, and of good quality*.

Solutions

The (social) problems referred to above have to be solved from different points of view.

Central themes of the eHealth track are:

- Interoperability of eHealth systems and services, calling for collaboration among:
 - Care providers
 - Industry

- Science
 - Platform for worldwide experiences with eHealth. Learn from other countries, industries or companies and share best practices.
 - People have the right to guide their own health care and care needs. IT should be helpful to that and should therefore be applied more constructively.
 - IT should be used in better and more creative ways, in a world that is made better by it, not more difficult, riskier or far more intrusive
 - Building an international single market for fundamental common structures in public- private partnerships
 - Availability of eHealth applications and knowledge of eHealth in developing countries

The program for the eHealth track is structured within this context, along three lines:

1. Conditions and use of the information society. Health care is one of the sectors most heavily dependent on information: the exchange of reliable information and the use of information at any moment, irrespective of time and place. The basis of information is the Electronic Health Record for professionals and patients. Expert systems for professionals, patient use of the internet to search for information on diseases patients, lifestyle and quality information for professionals and exchanges of information with other patients or other professionals (second opinions) are also extremely important. In short, we must use the possibilities of web 2.0 and 3.0 (care on distance and co-creation).
2. IT applications in the health care process. The patient should be able to take the lead in his or her own life and care process. Implementing telemedicine applications (teleconsultation, telemonitoring, etc) and self management give the care sector the possibility of organizing care around the patient. Applications such as telesurgery, professional collaboration, educational tools and logistic tools also improve the quality and efficiency of care. Special attention should be given to IT applications in developing countries. The challenge for the industry is to implement new technologies while taking existing (technological) possibilities into account.
3. (Re-)use of data. A lot of information about patients offers the opportunity to provide an individual with concrete, specific, tailor-made services. At the population level, patient information can be categorized for specific groups, specific purposes and research. The re-use of data should tackle privacy and ethical aspects. This information is stored in different places and calls for public-private collaboration to optimize its use for solving societal problems and providing services on an individual level.

These three important themes for eHealth are in different stages of discussion, deployment, testing, implementation or internalization. Therefore attention is divided - as in other tracks - into inspiration, innovation and implementation.

Link with other Tracks

eHealth is not about health alone, but also about societies and their influence on daily life. Therefore this track can be linked to many other tracks of WCIT2010. Specifically we mention three:

- *Cyber security and safety*

The implementation of eHealth involves several security issues. How can security and protection of patients' personal data be guaranteed (e.g. with regard to the Electronic Health Record)? The exchange of reliable information is of major importance for the health care sector.

- *E-government*

As a result of the information society, there is a growing demand for reliable information. People also want a say in government decisions, especially when health is involved.

- *Creative industries*

One of the applications of eHealth is serious gaming, which can be used for both patients and professionals. Gaming for children with diabetes, for instance, helps them learn how to cope with the disease (self-management). For professionals, serious gaming is used for training purposes.

European Component

eHealth is one of the important issues on the European Union agenda. The EU is well aware of the importance of implementing eHealth in all member states, and the vital importance of collaboration across borders. The post i-2010 agenda will be presented at the WCIT2010.

Some objectives and actions on eHealth on the EU agenda:

- The Community health strategy (2008-2013) is to support dynamic health systems and new technologies, recognising that new technologies can improve disease prevention, diagnosis, treatment, facilitate patient safety and improve health systems coordination, use and sustainability
- That EU and member states recognise the benefits of eHealth for a safer and more efficient health sector, calling for action on building an eHealth area for European citizens, and initiating a process for coordinated action in the field of eHealth.
- In the lead market initiative for Europe special emphasis is placed on the need to remove the barriers of market fragmentation and a lack of interoperability of eHealth systems in order to accelerate the development of the market.
- A Commission Recommendation on cross-border interoperability of electronic health record systems
- A Commission Communication on telemedicine for the benefit of patients, health care systems and the economy.

Conclusion

The eHealth track will address making a contribution to a future without boundaries. The track aims to illustrate the different roles of stakeholders and create insight in how innovation can be accelerated in order to guarantee accessible, good quality health care. The track will also inspire professionals and stakeholders to overcome gaps and challenges through collaboration and public-private partnerships. Inspiring examples will show professionals (care providers) how to improve cooperation with each other and with patients, supported by IT. Most of all, the track will stress the importance of IT in helping patients to take the lead in their own health, health care and daily lives. The significance of eHealth is not limited to the health care sector, but can be contextualized much more extensively.