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What can information technologies do to improve the delivery of healthcare? A ‘European Voice’ e-health debate

Can e-health be a driver for growth and innovation? How should the gap between promise and practice be closed?

In a debate organized both in Brussels and in Washington DC (via teleconference) by the weekly Brussels newspaper dedicated to EU Affairs, ‘European Voice’ the 23rd of February, experts from the information technologies’ sector and representatives from technological enterprises presented their work on the development of a model for analyzing healthcare systems that would help policymakers assess the potential effects of introducing IT.

Wendy Currie, Professor at Warwick Business School, UK, presented the TEMPEST model. This model is named after the initials of the seven critical areas that can enable the adoption and diffusion of eHealth technologies: Technology, Economic, Market, Political, Evaluation, Social and Transformational change. The TEMPEST model is aiming at evaluating, in a systematic manner, the use of electronic health records, personal health records (held by the patient), electronic booking of appointments, telemedicine, the electronic transfer of prescriptions etc.



Zoran Stančič, the European Commission's Deputy-Director general for information society and media, remarked that the TEMPEST study “*highlighted the relevance of setting up the right governance structure for eHealth*”. He also underlined *the importance of the EU Health Ministers' agreed conclusions on “safe and efficient healthcare through eHealth”*.

According to Mr. Stančič, ‘*the conclusions commit governments to removing barriers hampering the deployment of eHealth services and to consider the creation of specific financial incentive mechanisms*’. The Deputy-Director added that the European Commission “*looked forward to strengthening co-operation with the US*” on eHealth, building on a “*structured discussion*” that was launched in 2005.

Summing up contributions from EU stakeholders, **John Vassallo**, Microsoft Vice-president EU affairs, noticed that an issue of key importance was whether proponents of eHealth could demonstrate the benefits of the technology: “*Can we show savings, can we measure costs?*” he wondered. Mr. Vassallo also stressed the benefits that eHealth could have for developing countries.

The crucial question of the patient’s rights regarding the use of his/her data, and the protection of privacy was somehow neglected by the speakers present at this debate, hopefully a more patient-oriented approach to the question of e-health might be envisaged in a future meeting.

Results of the HPCB Survey on Information Sharing and the implementation of the Portugal Agreement

Between August 2009 and November 2009, Healthcare Professionals Crossing Borders (HPCB – of which FEPI is an active member) held a survey to assess the implementation of the Portugal Agreement across healthcare professional regulators in Europe. The questionnaire was distributed to competent authorities via the HPCB network, and Member-States representatives within the European Commission’s Coordinators Group and Implementation Committee for the Directive 2005/36/EC. The HPCB Secretariat received 41 responses coming from 22 countries.



As you know the Healthcare Professionals Crossing Borders (HPCB – a European panel of healthcare stakeholders) periodically organizes a survey to evaluate its key document (the Portugal Agreement, available [here](#)).

The latest survey ended in November 2009 and the Secretariat of HPCB recently published its results. It was developed following discussions at the HPCB Spring conference held in Dublin in March 2009 (where FEPI was represented) and included question from the following areas: Transparency and access to information; Proactive and reactive information exchange; Notification of hearings and disciplinary decisions; Competence assurance of healthcare professionals; Professional standards.

The outcomes of this survey have demonstrated that significant progress has been made in regard to the sharing of reactive information across competent authorities in many European jurisdictions. It has also indicated a growing level of support for the IMI system (of the European Commission) and presented a number of options to develop the system in a constructive way. The survey also highlighted a number of risk areas, including the inability of some competent authorities to share detailed information or to consider evidence about a healthcare professional's fitness to practice produced by another competent authority. The difficulties competent authorities face with the recognition of decisions about healthcare professionals taken in other jurisdictions represents an important risk for patient safety.

Following the results of the survey, HPCB has decided to pursue the following objectives:

- Continue to disseminate information about EU policy and legislative developments as well as regulatory news through the HPCB website and the Crossing Borders Update newsletter.
- Continue to support IMI and explore whether it could be enhanced in order to allow for the proactive exchange of information and provide a tool for those competent authorities that currently cannot share information because of privacy concerns.
- Organise an event on Directive 2005/36/EC in 2010 for healthcare professional regulators to share views and experiences on the Directive in light of its upcoming review.

FEPI Secretariat will of course keep you updated on any information relating to HPCB.

HPCB website: <http://www.hpcb.eu/>

Survey in question:

http://www.hpcb.eu/news/documents/HPCB_Survey_results_Information_sharing_and_the_Portugal_Agreement_March_2010.pdf.

Conferences and Events to come

- **European Parliament seminar on patient healthcare and safety - 14 April 2010**
 - o The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) group in the European Parliament will host a seminar on patient healthcare and safety, under the sponsorships of MEPs Marian Harkin and Antonyia Parvanova. The title of the seminar is: *'Impact of internet pharmacy and medicine services on patient healthcare and safety'*.
 - o **Where?** European Parliament, Brussels, Belgium
 - o **When?** Wednesday 14 April 2010 - 16.00-19.00
 - o **Info:** elissa.bensalah@europarl.europa.eu
 - o **FEPI representative:** Mr. Laurent Louette, Policy and Press Officer

- **Policy Dialogue on Investing in Europe's Health Workforce of tomorrow: Scope for Innovation and Collaboration**
 - o The European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies from the European Office of the WHO organized its policy dialogue on Investing in Europe's Health Workforce of tomorrow: Scope for Innovation and Collaboration.
 - o **Where?** Leuven, Belgium
 - o **When?** 26 April 2010
 - o **FEPI representatives:** Mr. Laurent Louette, Policy and Press Officer and Dr. Theodoros Koutroubas, Senior Policy Adviser.

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