



eHealth for a Healthier Europe!

– a Presidency Report on opportunities for a better use of healthcare resources



The Swedish Presidency of the EU presents a report on eHealth that demonstrates the connection between political goals, eHealth technologies and potential benefits in order to introduce an approach for facilitating decision-making when prioritising investments in eHealth. The study was conducted by Gartner during the period December 2008 – May 2009 in six EU Member States: the Czech Republic, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain and the United Kingdom.

The report aims to:

- provide concrete examples of how to work with a benefit model to analyse how political goals can be realised through eHealth
- visualize and quantify fact-based benefits of continued implementation of eHealth in the EU
- give support for prioritisation of eHealth initiatives
- create a stepping stone for further work.

The increased understanding of how improvements in healthcare can be supported by technology and how these technologies are connected to political goals, was accomplished by using a new benefit model in which results of a continued implementation of technologies are calculated based on the current medical and technology status in the participating Member States.

Whilst ensuring the ability to both effectively and efficiently meet the increasing demands for care, policy makers and care delivery organisations also need to improve other important political aspects of healthcare, such as:

- Availability (equal access, reduced waiting times and better utilisation of resources)
- Continuity of care (coordination of activities and information sharing among care providers)
- Empowerment (patient-centricity, influence and direct involvement in the patient's own care)
- Patient safety (evidence based healthcare, reduced risk of patient harm)
- Quality of care (patient satisfaction, effectiveness and efficiency of care service provision)



Results

There is a significant potential for healthcare improvement using eHealth as a catalyst. For the five political goals used in the study, the technology adoption is lower than 30%. The potential improvements are of such magnitude that they demand both attention and action from all Member States. Examples of quantified potentials include:

- 5 million yearly outpatient prescription errors could be avoided through the use of Electronic Transfer of Prescriptions.
- 100,000 yearly inpatient adverse drug events could be avoided through Computerised Physician Order Entry and Clinical Decision Support. This would in turn free up 700,000 bed-days yearly, an opportunity for increasing throughput and decreasing waiting times, corresponding to a value of almost €300 million.
- 9 million bed-days yearly could be freed up through the use of Computer-Based Patient Records, an opportunity for either increasing throughput or decreasing waiting times, corresponding to a value of nearly €3,7 billion.
- Over 11,000 diabetic deaths could be avoided every year in all studied countries by educating the patient and enabling them to better manage their condition through the use of EMR and Chronic Disease Management.

In summary, research shows that organisations that successfully leverage IT can rapidly increase their effectiveness. Results from early adopters of eHealth hint at its potential. Meanwhile, some healthcare organisations have negative experience of failed eHealth projects and are frustrated by the systems currently installed. Such experiences should be reviewed for lessons learnt and should not be allowed to become barriers to progress. Regardless of the pace of adoption, there are both general and healthcare-specific issues that will need to be tackled. In order to move initiatives forward, key stakeholders must create a climate that enables a culture of openness, positive attitude, pragmatism, shared goal-setting and learning.

Other challenges include locating reliable data was a key issue when performing the study. In medicine, the demand for evidence has always been high and in that light it is paradoxical that key metrics related to healthcare quality, efficiency and availability of care are tracked in a scattered way, if measured at all.

Recommendations

The report stresses the necessity for each of the Member States to:

- prioritise eHealth initiatives based on political goals and documented benefits
- improve measurement and collection of healthcare statistics related to eHealth
- continue to improve and develop present systems, and work on the communication of delivered success
- develop methods to evaluate, track and reduce medical errors and wastage of resource
- create a culture which promotes development and praises success.