



European Union of Medical Specialists  
 Union Européenne des Médecins Spécialistes

# The Newsletter of European Medical Specialists



High Level Conference and Exhibition  
 Malaga, Spain, 10-12 May 2006

## eHealth High Level Conference and Exhibition Malaga, 10-12.05.2006



### Summary:

- The European Commission launched a new 'Health-EU Portal'
- eHealth Conference workshop on health professionals
- Interview of Mr. José Luis Rocha, General Secretary for Quality and Modernization for the Andalusian Regional Minister for Health

### In this issue:

- New EU portal on health launched 2
- New skills for a new world of professionals 2
- New IT in the service of medical education 3
- Events 4

*Last week, the now traditional, eHealth High Level Conference and Exhibition closed its doors in Malaga. Each year, stakeholders, politicians and industry representatives discuss this topic which is expected to thoroughly stir up medical practice as we have experienced it to date.*

Despite the widespread fear and concerns for this unfamiliar phenomenon, there is no logical reason to oppose its growing influence in the medical world. Information technologies have long invaded all aspects of everyone's daily life and, whether we like it or not, it is only a natural development to see it happen in the healthcare sector.

However, one might still wonder to what extent this trend will affect medical practice in the near future. And it is not unreasonable to admit that different kinds of health professionals share concerns about it. Of course the very term "eHealth" is interpreted in many different ways covering different aspects of healthcare. For administrators it can be electronic patient records that may be exchanged and used in analysis of care, treatments

and drugs. For patients, it may be an extra resource to inform about disorders and options following medical consultation. For doctors it may assist in doctor-doctor consultation, a facility to check latest research and opinions on disease and therapies, or an educational tool for Continuing Medical Education.

A commonly accepted fear when discussing eHealth involves the relation between doctors and their patients, notably because of the perceived lack of safety and secrecy when it comes to data protection. Despite all the guarantees put forward by the industry, this issue needs to be thoroughly addressed with the highest scrutiny, such as outlined in the Annual Report (2005) of the European Data Protection Supervisor.

Another factor involves the overload of information available thanks to the new technologies. The EU has

already been successful in providing guidance on the quality of healthcare-related websites although their use seems to not be widely disseminated yet. This will unfortunately not ensure that every piece of medical information available on the web is accurate or relevant to patients looking for complementary knowledge on their condition. Patients are likely to need further support to understand medical jargon, sometimes –not to say often– difficult to comprehend. Informing patients is certainly not enough and it is of course the doctors' duty to help them. This is simply the very reason why the doctor-to-patient relationship will need to be tightened. This leads us back to the classical paradox in the IT revolution where we see people connected to the world but alone in front of their screens...

**Continued on page 4**

## New EU portal on health launched

**The European Commission recently launched a new 'Health-EU Portal' with an aim to answer the needs of an estimated third of the EU population searching for information on different health issues.**

According to the Commission, one third of Europeans is surfing the Internet to find information on health-related issues. In order to help these peo-

ple, the Commission launched, in the framework of the eHealth Conference 2006, a new portal dedicated to Health.

This 'Health-EU Portal' aims to be a gateway and 'one-stop-shop' to simple and reliable information on 6 thematic health areas, divided in 47 topics, touching upon issues from health insurance to infectious diseases.

This site aims to provide

citizens, patients and professionals with information on both health topics and related EU policies as well as the latest developments in research.

The 'Health-EU Portal' supplies links to all Member States' health-related policies and to a large number of specialised websites.

*The 'Health-EU Portal' is available at the following address:*

<http://health.europa.eu>



Source: [health.europa.eu](http://health.europa.eu)

**HOME**

## New skills for a new world of professionals

**On the occasion of the eHealth High Level Conference in Malaga, a seminar was held on "The New Skills for a New World of Health Professionals". This workshop addressed issues such as eHealth innovations in professional training and doctor-patient relationships.**

The workshop notably focused on the use of IT programs to improve the quality of life for the elderly, young people and those with chronic illnesses. Speakers emphasized the need to raise awareness on new technologies and move past traditional methods to achieve progress in a new era of eHealth. Another

key topic was the involvement of health organisations and the diffusion of information to a general public.

Speakers discussed eHealth programs currently in use, the overall success of IT applications and the future of such technologies. Mr. Yuncap Kwanka, eHealth coordinator with the World Health Organization (WHO), presented some eHealth endeavours, such as the WHO Health Academy, which aims to distribute health knowledge in a variety of locations, languages and cultures.

The use of integrated care systems to ease the way of life for the elderly and patients with chronic illnesses was also addressed. Methods such as

**In any case the healthcare professionals as the users of eHealth systems have to be much more involved in the discussion, definition and implementation than they are right now. eHealth optimizes workflows in healthcare and is therefore affecting the daily work of physicians.**

**They know best how to work efficiently, but they have also to be incentivated and reimbursed for efficient and patient centric work and care. The money has to reflect the quality of work also in healthcare. This side is still not discussed in the eHealth debate.**



**Volker Wetekam**

**Siemens Medical Solutions  
Health Services**

Intelligent Drug Delivery Devices and integrated home and community based care have been implemented in several countries.

Speakers were also hopeful for continued progress and success in the field of eTraining and the improvement of doctor-patient relationships.



Source: [www.hsc.unt.edu](http://www.hsc.unt.edu)

**HOME**



## New Information and Communication Technologies in the service of medical education

The Andalusian Region (Spain) where the eHealth Conference took place has taken the lead in Europe in terms of medical innovation and information technologies. This is why we reproduce here extracts of an interview of José Luis Rocha, General Secretary of Quality and Modernization for the Andalusian Regional Minister for Health, conducted by José María Hoyos. For further information, please visit: [www.ehealthconference2006.org](http://www.ehealthconference2006.org)

### **What are the main benefits for the healthcare professionals in Andalusia?**

The health care professionals are the users of the majority of these new technological tools which already form a natural part of their daily work.

Technical innovations make routine jobs easier and can even remove some of them. However, the principal benefit they provide is the improvement of health care quality and safety.

For example, the digital health record, which provides direct access to all the available clinical information on the patient, leads to the provision of safer health-care because it minimizes data loss, avoids the need to repeat tests and the consequent risks this involves; it also simplifies coordination among professionals and in general facilitates patient care and the work of the professionals.

The electronic prescription also provides more accurate therapeutic compliance surveillance, removes bureaucratic tasks and increases available consultation time to provide patient care. It also allows for more cooperative work among physicians and pharmacists.

On the other hand, advances in communication technologies

allow the design and implantation of powerful tools for medical education, specifically aimed at facilitating continuous professional development, such as e-training, virtual simulation or on-line access to digital libraries.

I would like to underline that, in order to make these advances truly helpful to the health care professionals; it is necessary to involve them in the building of all the modernisation and technological development strategies, taking into consideration their preferences and needs when serving the citizens.

### **What feedback are you getting from the healthcare professionals?**

Very positive. In the health care field professionals are used to working with technological innovations and are accustomed to their advantages. That's why they not only welcome technological projects, but, frequently, they themselves are the driving force behind these innovations.

### **One of the most ambitious eHealth projects is the so-called Virtual Library. What does this project have to offer to the healthcare professionals?**

There is free and permanent on-line access to the majority of scientific journals on health and life sciences (currently almost 1.000 journals), as well as the official publications and other references. Professionals can access this from work as well as from their home by using a personal password. The virtual library has an exclusive portal with its own search engine and many additional utilities designed to meet the needs of the professionals. For example, it allows the creation of practice communities, the generation of intelligent

searches or access-personalisation according to individual preferences.

Another project on eHealth specifically oriented for healthcare professionals is the IAVANTE Project with its headquarters at the CMAT in Granada.

### **What is IAVANTE and are there any more centres like CMAT projected?**

The IAVANTE Foundation for Technological Advancement and Professional Training is a public organisation dedicated to professional training in health care and contributes to innovation in new technologies in this field. IAVANTE uses modern teaching methods such as virtual simulation, robotic simulation, e-training, or role-playing. In 2005, more than 6.000 health professionals were trained in IAVANTE. The largest of its centres, named CMAT, is located in Granada, but IAVANTE has also two centres equipped with state-of-the-art technology, in Malaga and Seville, and carries out many on-line activities and non-residential programmes, mainly in the hospitals.

### **More recently created and with almost countless possibilities is the Virtual Reality Program that has been already successfully tested. What is it about?**

We are very excited with this project and it has delivered positive results in a short space of time. It consists of obtaining very high resolution and quality three-dimensional images from conventional radiological pictures

such as CAT or MRI scanning. Specific software allows the manipulation of these images, for example, in order to anticipate the final outcome of a complex surgical intervention, or to select the best surgical approach for a specific patient. In addition, this can be carried out on a conventional computer and requires very little time.



**Viviane Reding** (European Commissioner for Information Society and Media) and **María Jesús Montero** (Andalusian Regional Minister for Health) at the IAVANTE Centre.

### **From what particular projects are already the healthcare professionals benefiting?**

There are some groups of experts working with this software, especially in maxillofacial surgery and plastic surgery, where the virtual reality system seems to be very useful in some types of operations such as face or breast reconstruction. Furthermore, we are applying it in neurosurgery, cardiac surgery, prenatal diagnosis and other fields.

*This interview was conducted in the framework of the eHealth High Level Conference held in Malaga (Spain) from 10 to 12 May 2006. These views have not been adopted or in any way approved by the UEMS and should not be relied upon as a statement of the UEMS.*



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### Continued from page 1

It is unfortunate that the pressure on doctors' shoulders will increase while the time available for each patient is already diminishing. It is now up to decision-makers to empower doctors, and healthcare professionals as a whole, to ensure a smooth implementation of the system. These factors explain the fears and reluctance commonly spread among health professionals and individual citizens towards the eHealth phenomenon. It is therefore of the highest importance to hold a transparent debate on this issue at the European, national and regional levels as eHealth will have a major impact on the daily medical practice of millions of health professionals across Europe.

Many people are worried that the true reason to push for implementing eHealth throughout Europe relates more to other political arguments, such as healthcare costs to social security systems, than to simply seeking better clinical decisions and care. This is why



Source: [www.esa.int](http://www.esa.int)

stakeholders need to carefully assist decision takers at the national and regional levels. Politicians should give the necessary guarantees that computerising healthcare provisions will not serve other purposes rather than simply improving quality. The medical profession is right to fear increased pressure and control on doctors because of economic or budgetary reasons. Even though these aspects are rightfully important, it cannot be accepted that the way doctors practice is guided by top-down administrative rulings. Awareness-raising and dialogue are therefore urgently needed not only among practicing health professionals but

also politicians, especially at the local level.

At the EU level, the process recently undertaken by the European Commission within the eHealth Stakeholders Group appears to be extremely important at a time when all EU Member States are looking into this issue. This Group brings together representatives from the industry and health professionals' associations to provide expert-knowledge and advice to Member States sitting in the eHealth Working Group. Doctors, nurses, pharmacists and hospital managers must now seize the opportunity to make their voice heard at the highest level.

Healthcare professionals should never underestimate their potential to advise decision-makers. Doctors have now to take advantage of the opportunity to influence the debate in accordance with their ethical obligations and seek assurance that their practice will not be affected to the detriment of their patients.

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*If you have any views with regard to the issues covered in this Newsletter, do not hesitate to contact the Secretariat of UEMS.*

## Events

### Conference on ePrescribing & Medication Management

Ljubljana (Slovenia), 19-20 June 2006  
For further information: [www.ehtel.org](http://www.ehtel.org)

### World of Health IT

Geneva (Switzerland), 10-13 October 2006  
For further information: [www.worldofhealthit.org](http://www.worldofhealthit.org)