ICT Networks Prerequisite for Healthcare at Home

Background:

'Homecare' refers to a wide range of health and social services delivered at home.

The ageing population is rapidly leading to an increase in the number of Europeans dependent on care and a modification of disease patterns, making chronic-degenerative diseases more prevalent. This, combined with shrinking healthcare and nursing workforces, has led experts and policymakers to consider homecare as a long-term solution.

Technology, particularly active devices such as dialysis systems, wrist-worn monitoring devices and biomedical clothes, can add to the quality of homecare. However, several barriers to the take-up of such technology exist. These include financial, organisational and legal issues as well as privacy concerns, data protection and interoperability.

Issues:

The European Homecare Conference 2008, which took place on 4 December 2007, gathered policymakers, industry representatives and patient groups to discuss the organisation and financing of homecare, the need for integrated homecare services, the impact of healthy technology and the health policy challenges for decision-makers.

In the session on the impact of health technology on homecare, the medical device industry urged for existing technologies to be taken up more quickly, whereas the Commission and a regional representative emphasised the need to put in place health information and communication networks first.

Positions:

"Even though the technology is there, its uptake in the homecare sector is too slow because of the financial hurdles and the rigid organisation of healthcare," said Rosanna Tarricone, director of Eucomed economic affairs.

"Reimbursement schemes disincentivise providers from adopting innovative technologies as the benefits do not fall in the investors' purse, but to patients and their carers," she added, emphasising the need to change the way healthcare is financed and organised from the vertical approach of the 1970s to a more horizontal one, in which "the regulatory framework should not be a barrier".

G

Published on : Mon, 10 Dec 2007