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MEPs Discuss eHealth Interoperability and the Role of ICT to Address Healthcare Challenges

On November 16 2010, Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Milan Cabrnoch hosted the 'Crossing boundaries in ehealth: the CALLIOPE think tank and collaboration platform' at the European Parliament. The meeting began with opening remarks by Mr Cabrnoch and a presentation on the European strategy for e-health. Zoi Kolitsi, CALLIOPE Project Coordinator, outlined the main outcomes of the 30-month project in the presentation 'CALLIOPE Thematic Network: Lessons learned', which explained the work of CALLIOPE, a multi-stakeholder platform on e-health interoperability launched in 2008 and highlighted the different boundaries in e-health. The CALLIOPE network was also launched in order to analyse the Member States' responses to the EC Interoperability Recommendation and has produced the 'EU e-health Interoperability Roadmap for Sustainable Health', 'the Roadmap' to accelerate e-health Deployment, which was presented by Michèle Thonnet, CALLIOPE Leader e-health Roadmap.

Clemens Auer, from the Austrian Ministry of Health presented the project structure of the e-health Governance Initiative, which is planned for launch in January 2011 and will be the turning point from analysis and consultation to Member States' steering e-health. The possible workplan includes:

- Developing key actions for cross border e-health deployment in Europe
- Development of common patient IDs and authentication
- Availability of basic patient information to all MS (to facilitate cross border operability of services such as ePrescription)
- Clarification of legal issues (for cross border data exchanges etc)

Mr Auer also strongly underlined the need for a consolidated approach and a strong political commitment to governance at policy, strategy and operational levels.

The panel discussion on 'The Role of ICT to Address Healthcare Challenges' highlighted some of concerns and opinions of important stakeholder groups. Michael Wilks, representing CPME (Standing Committee of European Doctors), emphasised the need to stay realistic and support the changes, which are already in the process of developing. One of the problems is that everybody wants to be treated locally but some things need to be centralised for better results and telemedicine, including services such as tele-consultation, can help to break down some of the borders and improve patient access to cross border services. Paul de Raeve, from the EFN (European Federation of Nurses) explained that nurses do see the benefits of ICT but need to understand the specific benefits for them and how e-health can support them in their work. There is also a need to adapt to the older workforce, who needs more investment in training. Liuska Sanna, from the EPF (European Patients Forum) explained that ICT solutions mean a lot of change, including the role of patients and an increase in patient involvement and continuity of care. However, transparency is needed for security and patient safety and the roadmap needs to take into consideration the users' needs. Niels Rossing from MedCom (National Competence Centre in Denmark) was happy that the discussion has reached the political level however it is necessary to solve problems with regional governance and find a way to link regions and the European level. Pascal Garel, representing HOPE (European Hospital and Healthcare Federation), highlighted the need to continue with a 'bottom-up approach' and stay in contact with all stakeholders. Mr Garel also raised questions about the standard gaps between hospitals in Europe and stressed that not all hospitals are ready for implementation of common standards.

During the Q&A session, which followed, representatives from the health industry highlighted the need for more common standards in and solutions for the fragmentation of the European healthcare market, which would not only increase competitiveness but also reduce costs.

Concluding the event, Mr Cabrnoch referred to the ongoing negotiation between the European Parliament, Council and the Commission on article 13 of the Commission proposal for a directive on patient's rights for cross border healthcare and prompted stakeholders to provide their input to the parliament to ensure that the provision on e-health in the Directive is strong enough to ensure proper and needed implementation.

For more information, please visit:
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