

E-HEALTH WEEK 2016

OPENING PLENARY

BEURS VAN BERLAGE, AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS

WEDNESDAY, 8 JUNE 2016 AT 9:35

SPEAKING NOTE: CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Minister Schippers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to be here today to mark the opening of the eHealth Week 2016, here in the heart of Amsterdam.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Dutch Presidency for its hospitality and for all its hard and dedicated work in organising the biggest annual eHealth conference in Europe.

I am pleased that this eHealth Week places great emphasis on putting patients centre stage in the developments and discussions on eHealth.

We live in a time where the shift from doctor-centred to patient-centred healthcare draws ever closer.

In less than a decade, digital applications and digital solutions have found their way into our daily lives – including in the area of healthcare.

People use more and more mobile devices allowing them to monitor their own health and wellbeing.

At the same time, patients know more about their rights in healthcare and the possibilities of treating their condition due to widely available information on the Internet.

Patients expect and demand top-quality healthcare. As a medical doctor myself, I support this change – where patients are empowered to make informed and appropriate decisions on their own health and wellbeing.

eHealth could play an important role in further empowering patients. New innovative solutions such as mobile health apps can be very useful for preventing diseases.

They enable people to take an active role in, for example, the management of their health by tracking their fitness and by monitoring their health status. This in turn can help in managing chronic conditions.

eHealth creates new possibilities and opportunities to tackle some of Europe's most pressing challenges in the healthcare sector.

One of our great successes is our increasing longevity. But this success has created another challenge – an ageing population. The number of people aged over 65 years will nearly double in the coming decades; these people will represent about one third of the EU population by 2060.

Linked to longevity is the increase in the number of people with chronic diseases, putting further pressure on our healthcare systems.

These challenges call for innovative solutions. Our progressively digitalised society can offer such solutions if we are able to properly harness and incorporate technological developments into our health systems.

It is now time to make a move from developing and testing to actual implementation of eHealth solutions in health systems to reap their full benefits.

In a WHO study, a lack of funding was found to be one of the biggest obstacles for countries to set up digital health systems.

Thanks to the funding possibilities under the Connecting Europe Facility, the EU has pushed two cross-border eHealth solutions into an implementation phase – exchange of e-prescriptions and patient summaries.

Member States for their part have shown great willingness to take eHealth forward to the next level.

As many as 20 Member States filed an application under the Facility, and made the commitment to connect their health systems for the purpose of exchanging health data on e-prescriptions and patient summaries.

I look forward to 2018 when the first exchanges between countries should go live.

I believe the health sector can and must further harness the digital potential to prevent diseases; to create better, more efficient and sustainable healthcare for EU citizens; whilst boosting employment and stimulating innovation and competitiveness.

Just over a year ago, the European Commission launched the Digital Single Market Strategy.

Digitizing the healthcare sector through eHealth solutions increases the competitiveness of the EU and at the same time creates high quality jobs. It is an important engine for innovative products and services as well as for creative solutions.

An important aspect in order to achieve this is to invest more in the interoperability of ICT solutions and European standards.

In order to live up to the commitments made in this Strategy, my priority is to foster the standardisation and interoperability of eHealth solutions, and promote telemedicine and mHealth.

In April of this year the European Commission published a set of Communications on digitising industry and related services announcing its intentions on where to focus its actions.

eHealth was included in the actions with a focus on supporting Member States in the development of cross-border services and in fostering the deployment of telemedicine and tele-monitoring, in particular in the context of the European Reference Networks.

The implementation of European Reference Networks (ERNs) is currently one of the most important and innovative cross European cooperation initiatives in healthcare.

ERNs will help facilitate access to diagnosis and treatment by centralising knowledge and experience, medical research and training, and resources in the area of rare or low prevalence complex diseases or conditions.

The principle for establishing ERNs is that expertise should be brought closer to the patients' home. This is the true essence of telemedicine.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is clear that we must seize the opportunity to create a Europe where health systems are digitally connected and where all European citizens have access to high quality healthcare and their health data regardless of where they may be.

All of you play a key role towards achieving this aim by sharing your experiences and expertise and by playing your part to make eHealth reach its full potential to the benefit of all.

Thank you.

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