



What answers does health IT hold for the EU Baltic Region?

Next May, the eyes of European health IT practitioners are going to be fixed in one place: Riga, Latvia, in the lovely Baltic region of North-Eastern Europe. Once frozen in time under a rigid Communist oppression, that country has rapidly opened itself up, becoming not just part of the wider European Union political structure but also becoming one of the most Internet-friendly, 'wired-up' countries in the whole continent.

The amazing mix of dynamism and promise Latvia is now all about is surely the ideal backdrop for what is already confirmed, months ahead of its doors opening, as the biggest pan-European health technology get together in all of 2015.

Thus Riga will be hosting (May 11-12) the second mHealth Summit Europe (www.mhealthsummit.eu) – HIMSS Europe's rolling, global programme of focused conference and exhibition around the theme (and enormous potential) of practical mobile-driven healthcare. Even better: it's fantastic to be able to confirm that the Summit ([see more here](#)) is not just a follow-on from a successful first run last May (in Berlin): it's a definite next step in terms of agenda, expected audience numbers, sponsorship and commercial support.

What is also very significant about the meeting is that the whole Summit is in fact one of the central pillars of 'eHealth Week'. The Week has been set up by the Latvian government – which will be in the role of chair of the European Union next year – in partnership with HIMSS to gather as many of Europe's health informatics and policy leaders in one place. The aim? To try and build some real momentum about how to drive more use of technology into care - an evolution mHealth is expected to form a major component of.

Setting the questions is easy. Now we need some answers!

I've said a lot about 'Europe,' mainly because this is an event not just for the hospitals, vendors, politicians, administrators and commentators in the region but also, absolutely, its citizens and patients. This is nowhere more evident than in the fact that the central 'plenary' discussion of the Summit is going to be a public discussion of a major piece of research the European Commission (the policy and legal arm of the EU) published earlier this year.

In its so-called 'Green Paper' (in this context, a document published to stimulate discussion on given topics at European level), Brussels, after acknowledging that mHealth is shaping up to be "a supportive tool for the management and provision of healthcare," as well as offering "a more efficient way of delivering care through better planning, reducing unnecessary consultations and better prepared professionals receiving guidance on treatment and medication," offers undoubted benefits – but that it also raises a number of critical questions that Europe needs to find answers to, as a community.

These include looking at the best way of ensuring interoperability of mHealth applications with Electronic Health Records, plus what policy action does Europe need to take at both the EU, but also national, local level to support equal access and accessibility for Europe's half a billion inhabitants to healthcare via mHealth?

It also means working with, and learning from, colleagues around the world – who we in Europe need to talk to to get the insights we need to answer questions like, what issues should be tackled (as a priority) in the context of international cooperation to increase mHealth deployment - and how?

Riga is expected to be one of the best places – maybe the best place? – European health IT stakeholders will be able to start formulating the right responses... which is important, as Brussels is waiting for them, with its mHealth consultation process closing in July.

Europe, yes – but these are issues for all of us

It's an honour to be involved in both eHealth Week's organisation as well as the Summit. It shows, if nothing else, how close to the centre of events HIMSS Europe has become, as well as how relevant our events and programmes have become to the European healthcare world in such a short space of time.

I have used the word 'Europe' a lot. That's as it should be. But of course, both HIMSS and the issues the Summit and eHealth Week are about are *global*, too. So there's no reason at all you guys can't come and help us work out some of the answers...

So – see you in Riga next May?

Rainer Herzog
Managing Director
HIMSS Europe

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