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Integrated IT to Optimise Patient Care

In March of this year COCIR - the European trade association for the medical technology industry hosted a meeting with the European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, John Dalli and senior representatives from hospital and healthcare providers. The meeting in Paris showcased how integrated IT and innovative financial partnerships are optimising patient care.

Commissioner Dalli is supporting Member States on national efforts in improving health for millions of patients across Europe. Innovation, technology and smart financial investment are crucial in helping to resolve the increasing financial and demographic pressures common to all healthcare systems in Europe. As part of an ongoing dialogue, Commissioner Dalli accepted COCIR's invitation to spend some time looking in detail at examples of European best practice, including where EU funding is helping transform healthcare delivery.

"I was pleased to see and discuss innovative technologies from different industrial sectors combining with innovative healthcare models as well as financing solutions to enable better patient care and increased efficiency within this care setting," said Commissioner Dalli. "I have no doubt that healthcare systems need to use appropriate new technologies and other innovative solutions, if they are to emerge stronger from the current economic challenges," Dalli added.

Many of Europe's leading hospitals and healthcare providers have recognised the potential of using smart investment in medical technologies and IT to become 'healthcare hubs', forging improved networks with physicians and local clinical services to better manage the needs of patients in local facilities, even in their own homes.

As we are all aware, the European healthcare system is in a period of change, driven by demographic change, evolving skill shortages, rising consumer demands for better health and advances in healthcare technology. In the context of financial austerity, more local and regional hospital-centred networks are being developed to provide improved service to an ever more demanding and informed patient. Public and private partnerships and investments in healthcare technologies and research are driving a steady evolution in healthcare, set to benefit the lives of millions of Europeans and contribute to economic prosperity.

Commissioner Dalli visited the Institut Gustave Roussy, Ile-de-France. The Institut Gustave Roussy oncology hospital is an application service provider, showcasing cloud computing and telehealth. In France today, 75 percent of all public hospitals are still not equipped with an IT system for their imaging examinations. In an effort to save costs by quickly increasing the use of digital technology, the Ile de France Regional Healthcare Agency (ARS) contracted with a consortium to deliver digital, cloud-based PACS and archive services to the Île-de-France, the country's most populous region with over 12 million people.

The goal of this project was to enable regional healthcare professionals to share, analyse, interpret and archive the avalanche of patient information, which has been crucial in driving cost reductions and improved patient experience. This project has the capability to connect and share information from over 90 hospitals and 100 private practices across the region.

Additional presentations were also given on three Spanish hospitals. The Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau, Barcelona has partnerships for imaging technology and IT management. Multi-year partnership projects enable healthcare providers to reduce their risks and gain affordable access to the latest technologies. In 2009, a ten-year partnership was formed between the Sant Pau Hospital in Barcelona and an industry partner for a fully-managed service of Sant Pau's Imaging department at a fixed monthly fee.

As the first project of its kind in the region, the provider has defined a new imaging system department including technology, improved workflow and processes to handle the future growth and clinical ambitions of the hospital. The provider also renews the technology according to a capital asset plan, taking into account technological advances that occur during the contract period. The managed service includes MR3, CT4, molecular imaging, X-ray and ultrasound.

Also presented was the Hospital Universitari de la Ribera in Valencia, which showcases the public-private partnership management model and is a prime example of a high quality and sustainable healthcare system. Using advanced IT systems (including electronic medical records and telemedicine) in combination with latest diagnostic technologies and comprehensive educational programmes further assures consistent, high-quality and sustainable delivery of healthcare under the programme. The patient benefits from no waiting times, screening programmes, single person rooms, homecare, patient healthcare programmes.

The Santa Lucia University Hospital (Cartagena)/Los Arcos del Mar Menor University Hospital (Murcia) was another excellent example of financing, medical equipment and IT integration as part of a public private partnership presented to the Commissioner. As part of a Public Private Partnership (PPP), these two hospitals in the Spanish Region of Murcia now have more than 100 imaging systems, such as computed tomography (CT) scanners and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) systems, as well as systems for molecular imaging, mammography and ultrasound.

"Hospitals of tomorrow, and healthcare professionals and administrators working within the healthcare system, need to have the tools and investment to cope with growing healthcare demand," said Heinrich von Wulfen, COCIR President. "Today, many leading hospitals will be critical players in an integrated healthcare delivery system which engages the consumer and understands the patient's disease and patient's biology in order to stratify the treatment. Such a system is digitally accessible in people's homes, community clinics and physicians' offices."

For more information, please visit: www.cocir.org

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