
Volume 3 / Issue 3 / 2008 - EU News

Benchmarking ICT Use Among GPs in Europe

E-Health applications have a growing role in the doctor's practices, according to the 'Benchmarking ICT use among General Practitioners in Europe' study carried out by consultants empirica in association with IPSOS on behalf of the European Commission, Information Society and Media Directorate- General.

The pan-European survey was recently published by the European Commission. It shows that 87% of European doctors (general practitioners) use a computer, while 48% have a broadband connection. By using e-Health applications, European doctors and medical services have already improved healthcare in Europe by means, for example, of more efficient administration procedures and shorter waiting times for patients.

However, significant differences remain in the availability and use of e-Health services across Europe. About 70% of European doctors use the Internet and 66% use computers for consultations. Furthermore, there are great discrepancies across countries: Estonia, Finland, Denmark, Sweden and Iceland have the highest broadband penetration among General Practitioners (91%), while countries such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia haven't reached the level of 50% (please see the table below).

Administrative patient data is electronically stored in 80% of general practices:

92% of these also electronically store medical data on diagnoses and medication;

35% electronically store radiological images.

European doctors often transfer data electronically with laboratories (40%), but less to other health centers (10%). The survey indicates that the countries most advanced in ICT access and connectivity are more likely to use them for professional reasons. For example, Denmark, where high-speed Internet is most widely available in Europe, sees extensive use of email communication between doctors and patients in about 60% of practices (the EU average is only 4%).

The survey also highlights areas for improvement and further deployment, such as electronic prescriptions (e Prescribing), which is practiced by only 6% of EU General Practitioners. This is widely used in only three Member States: Denmark (97%), the Netherlands (71%) and Sweden (81%).

Telemonitoring, however, is only used in Sweden (where 9% of doctors provide telemonitoring services), the Netherlands and Iceland (both about 3%). The Commission plans to report later this year on the potential and development of telemedicine. Exchange of patient data across borders is also reduced, done by only 1% of the EU's General Practitioners, and with the highest usage rate in the Netherlands (at 5%).

This year the Commission plans to make recommendations on cross-border interoperability of electronic health record systems and will launch, with several countries, a project on crossborder e-Health services for patients traveling within the EU. A majority of European doctors agree that ICT improves the quality of healthcare services that they provide. Doctors not using ICT accuse lack of training and technical support as major barriers. As for e-Health expansion, they request more ICT in medical education, more training and better electronic networking among healthcare practitioners wanting to share clinical information.

"Europe is starting to reap the benefits of broadband connections in the e-Health Sector. I welcome the efforts made by healthcare administrations and doctors to work more efficiently," explains Viviane Reding, EU Commissioner for Information Society and Media. "This diagnosis also shows that it is now time to use these electronic services much more widely as they have the potential to bring extraordinary benefits to all patients, all over Europe."

For more information, please visit: http://ec.europa.eu/information_society

Published on : Mon, 3 Mar 2008