EAHP Calls for Universal Use of Electronic Prescribing Across Europe

Ahead of its annual Congress in Hamburg, which is focused on the topic of patient safety, the European Association of Hospital Pharmacists (EAHP) has published a policy statement from its membership that calls for universal application of electronic prescribing across Europe in order to deliver a step change in medication error prevention. The statement also highlights the need for full take up of electronic patient health records and reemphasises the value of bedside scanning practices to reduce medication error at the point of administration in hospitals.

Dr Roberto Frontini, President of the European Association of Hospital Pharmacists, said: “New technology, and the burst of innovation it releases for finding new solutions to old problems, is an exciting process to witness. Europe’s hospital pharmacists embrace the possibilities technology offers for service improvement and better patient care. For example, electronic prescribing can eliminate so many of the problems associated with handwritten prescriptions, dramatically improve record keeping and offer a range of opportunities for enhancing prescribing practice. It must be a target to have such technology in place in all European healthcare systems.

However, as the EU institutions and national governments reflect on their role in delivering the promises of eHealth and mHealth, they must understand that the challenges of integrating new technology into healthcare are not new. Since the 1980s Europe’s hospital pharmacists have been highlighting the patient safety benefits of identifying medicines via a bar code to the single primary package unit, to facilitate for example, a bedside scan of the medicine immediately prior to its administration to the patient in hospitals. Yet for over 30 years that potential boon for reducing medication error remains unrealised as agreement by the pharmaceutical industry to change bar coding practices has not been achieved.

There’s a lesson in this. Talking about the potential benefits of new technology for healthcare delivery is not enough. Coordinated plans for implementation are required, involving all stakeholders, and potentially applied at pan-national levels.”

The new EAHP policy statement also provides a message of caution about ‘rogue’ or unregulated mHealth applications, that have not received appropriate oversight in their construction and could have potential negative impacts by offering contradictory, inaccurate or low quality advise to patients and healthcare professionals. Areas where this could become a significant concern include dosing calculators or dosing advice. EAHP highlight a need for a level of regulatory oversight with such applications, potentially through kitemark or national approval schemes.

The implementation of new technological innovations within health systems should also be conducted with healthcare professional training needs significantly in scope. The statement closes with a call for hospital pharmacists to always be involved in the design, specification of parameters and evaluation of ICT within the medicines processes of hospitals. The full EAHP policy statement on eHealth and mHealth is available here.

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