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Europe

Health-EU Launches e-Newsletter

From September 2007, the EU's Health Portal will be producing an online newsletter. Complementing the portal itself, the newsletter will give a selection of the latest news and activities in the field of public health at European and international level.

To bring the work of the EU in the field of public health closer to all stakeholders, whether members of the public or health professionals, the Health-EU newsletter will be hitting inboxes twice a month, giving the latest information in 20 of the EU's official languages, including healthcare action at EU level, future events and conferences on public health, latest publications and new links on the EU Health Portal.

For more details, see: ec.europa.eu/health-eu/newsletter_en.htm

EU to Study Electronic Chips for eHealth

The Commission has decided to study the options for using Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology in healthcare, with applications ranging from the identification of patients in hospitals to tagging pharmaceutical products.

The Commission recently published a call for tenders for a study on requirements and options for actions in Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology in healthcare.

The main objective of the study is to assess the expected features of RFID applications in the healthcare market and to build future scenarios in the field. It is also set to identify possible obstacles and needs for policy actions or specific research activities on the subject.

In healthcare, RFID is used primarily for tagging pharmaceuticals. In hospitals, RFID systems are used, for example, to identify patients and to permit relevant hospital staff to access medical records. The systems are said to save lives, prevent errors, save costs and increase security.

Results of a recent Commission consultation on RFID show privacy, health and environmental risks as the main stakeholder concerns with regard to the use of this technology. As to the use of RFID-based solutions in healthcare, 45% said they were positive about the technology, while 40% said that they had a negative view.

The Commission has also recently launched a procedure to study the economic aspects of eHealth in general, and of economic impact of interoperable electronic health records and ePrescription in particular.

Commission Weighs Up Options on eHealth Interoperability

The lack of interoperability in systems and services, such as electronic health records, patient summaries, and emergency data sets, has been identified as a major obstacle to the widespread take-up of eHealth application in the EU.

The Commission has launched a public consultation on the issue with a view to adopting specific guidelines later in the year.

The Commission's notion of eHealth interoperability is two-fold. In addition to the technical definition of the term that relates to connecting systems and exchanging information, it also seeks to recognise the concept of connecting people, data, and diverse health systems, while taking into account the relevant social, political, regulatory, business, industry and organisational factors.

The EU's eHealth action plan (2004) defines the block's priorities on the field until 2010. One of them is the development of interoperable

healthcare systems across the Union.

In June 2006, the Commission's ICT for Health Unit adopted a new strategy to promote the transformation of the European healthcare landscape, in line with the Commission's new policy framework i2010.

The Unit is currently in the process of drafting guidelines for good practice on eHealth interoperability.

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