
European Commission Signs eHealth Agreement With U.S. Department of Health



The Vice-President of the European Commission, Neelie Kroes, and United States Secretary of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius, have signed a Memorandum of Understanding in Washington, to promote a common approach on the interoperability of electronic health records and on education programmes for information technology and health professionals.

Common standards and interoperability stand to create huge growth opportunities for the eHealth industry as well as having a positive impact on the safety and quality of care. A skilled health IT workforce is necessary to make the benefits of eHealth services available to patients. This agreement aims to boost the potential of the eHealth market for EU companies wishing to do business in the US and vice versa. Promoting the use of eHealth technologies, with a view to improving the quality of health care, reducing medical costs and fostering independent living, including in remote places, is key objective of the Digital Agenda for Europe.

Neelie Kroes, Vice-President of the European Commission for the Digital Agenda, said: "Nothing makes more of a difference to people's lives than good health. I warmly welcome today's agreement. It is an excellent basis for the Commission and the US authorities to expand our cooperation on promoting the overall benefits of eHealth for patients, health systems and companies."

The aim of the Memorandum of Understanding is also to create new markets and growth opportunities for industry in the eHealth sector in both the EU and the US. The take up in the US of electronic health records outside hospitals is four times lower than in Europe. In the coming years, the US will invest around \$20 billion in deploying interoperable health records to physicians. This could have a positive impact on procurement for European companies in the US as well as boosting the Single Market for eHealth in the EU. This will give patients better health and quality of life and improve the existing infrastructure of health care systems.

The Memorandum stresses the need for a joint vision on internationally recognised and utilised interoperability standards for electronic health record systems and increased competences and mobility of IT professionals. Such common standards are important to achieve widespread interoperable eHealth services so that eHealth can reach its full global market potential.

The partnership between the EU and the US, the two world leaders in eHealth, sends a strong signal to all stakeholders that common standards and interoperability bring opportunities for a global approach for the benefit of patients, health systems and the market.

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