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FP7 Research Programme

What's in IT for Healthcare IT Managers

FP7 is composed of four specific programmes (see box).

In a fluid fashion, these interface into seven key Research Challenges that seek to ensure Europe becomes a world leader in IT. Under the banner 'A Healthcare Revolution', No. 5, is an explicit opportunity for healthcare IT. The healthcare IT-related implications of the Challenges are briefly discussed below.

1. Laying Tomorrow's Networks:

2. Focused on mastering

the development of future information infrastructures and makes specific note of delivering the benefits of IT in home healthcare.

2. Smarter Machines, Better Services:

The aim here is to make machines (ranging all the way to robots) work for us, rather than the other way round. The goal is somewhat poetic to make an 'intelligent' machine which sees the point in working for its human masters. Here too, explicit mention is made of healthcare applications.

3. The Nuts and Bolts of Tomorrow's Products:

This Challenge, essentially focused on embedded systems, covers a sweeping range of items, including flexible displays and medical devices.

4. Digital Content & Learning:

Essentially aimed at e-Learning, this Challenge would have relevance in areas such as continuing education for the medical and paramedical professions, as well as networking medical schools.

5. A Healthcare Revolution:

This catch-all Challenge notes that healthcare already accounts for about 9% of EU gross domestic product (GDP), and is rising. Meanwhile, given the information-intensive nature of the health sector, it acknowledges the emergence of e-Health as an "important new industry", with e-Health spending forecast at approximately 5% of the total health budget by 2010, up from 1% in 2000 (for the then-15 Member States). The real significance of this otherwise small (0.45%) share of GDP is validated by Goldman Sachs forecasts of the EU's 2010 GDP at almost \$13 trillion, which would entail e-Health revenues of about \$5.8 billion. Areas earmarked for attention include the quality, availability and effectiveness of healthcare by developing IT to improve everything from healthcare administration to biomedical imaging, from personalised, home-based care to the creation of new medicines.

6. Environment, Energy and Transport:

Some areas of relevance here may involve niches such as medical waste, mobility initiatives for elderly outpatients, 'intelligent' designing of future hospitals etc.

7. Access for All:

The aim of this challenge is social inclusion within the variety of facets in the next, unfolding wave of the IT revolution. One specific trend which is highlighted is the growth of the elderly in European society, with the share of over-65s rising from the current 20% to 28% by 2025. While there are overlaps with Challenge 5, as far as healthcare IT is concerned, the design of medical devices for remote patient monitoring especially of the

elderly and infirm, may be of significant interest to the EU.

Lending support to such a view is the existence of another Commission initiative called i2010 [Editor's Note: to be covered in the Summer Issue of HITM]. Out of four i2010 themes, one is called IT for Independent Living in an Ageing Society, and calls for providing the elderly, with IT tools to support their health, well-being and mobility. In turn, this is

expected to have a ripple effect on IT take-up across Europe, not least because of the demographic trend noted by the 'Access for All' Challenge. (TS)

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