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Results of the Monitoring National E-Health Strategies Study

"Europe is leading the rest of the world in advancing towards modern eHealth infrastructures and implementations" was the conclusion of Dr. Karl Stroetmann of empirica Consultants at an eHealth Strategies Symposium in Brussels.

This is a field where Europe has achieved and even overachieved its Lisbon Strategy goals. Results of the Monitoring National eHealth Strategies study (www.ehealth-strategies.eu) presented on Sept. 16, 2010 in Brussels, show that virtually all Member States of the European Union have either already begun or will begin shortly to undertake the implementation of national systems making basic patient data available to all healthcare professionals whenever and wherever needed.

While patient summary and Electronic Health Record (EHR)- like systems have already been high on the agenda for some time, most Member States (+16) now realise that there is an urgent need for (continuous) evaluation activities, both to better control policy progress and learn from challenges and experiences.

Ilias Iakovidis, Deputy Head of the ICT-for-Health Unit of the European Commission, which ordered this survey, noted "Services high on the agenda are the electronic transfer of prescriptions and the provision of telehealth services for doctors and patients in remote regions or for chronically ill patients at home. These are among the key activities identified in our 2004 eHealth Action Plan. We are happy to see that the development of this Lead Market Initiative, which we have supported for many years, is gaining such momentum."

Another indication of the strong political commitment at the national policy level is the growing establishment of permanent administrative support structures. National competence centres like Gematik, Germany's Society for Telematic Applications of the Health Card in Berlin; ASIP, France's Agence pour les Systèmes d' Information de santé Partagés in Paris; and THL, Finland's National Institute for Health and Welfare in Helsinki are increasingly used models of organisation.

More than 100 high level political representatives from European Ministries of Health, representatives of stakeholder associations and European policy institutions attended the workshop which showcased several good practice cases of Member States eHealth strategies and highlighted the overall trends across Europe with regards to eHealth initiatives and implementation. Compared to four years ago, when Member States had published only high level official policy documents or roadmaps, now almost all EU and EEA Member States have detailed documents outlining concrete eHealth goals, implementation measures and past achievements.

The results of the Monitoring National eHealth Strategies study reveal that reaching agreements with regards to eHealth strategies and, to a greater extent, implementation of these strategies across Europe have proven to be much more complex and time-consuming than initially anticipated. In addition, the complexity of eHealth as a management challenge has been vastly underestimated. It is evident that further exchanges of information on national and regional experiences are needed; both in relation to successes and failures, and that these lessons learned may prove particularly beneficial to eHealth in Europe as a whole.

Many challenges remain and there are many obstacles yet to be overcome: Issues of legality, semantic interoperability, standardisation and electronic identification domains must be resolved before these services can be regarded as truly Europe-wide and accessible to every citizen. Luc Nicolas from the Belgian Federal Public Health Services underlined that all Member States therefore "Strongly support the recently established eHealth Governance Initiative of European countries intended to tackle these and other issues at the highest political level."

For more information, please visit: www.ehealth-strategies.eu.

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