HealthManagement
Promoting Management and Leadership

Volume 4 - Issue 1, 2010 - News & Views

Update From the European Institutions

Spain Takes Over Presidency of EU Council

Spain has pledged to drive forward the realisation of the European Research Area (ERA) during its six-month Presidency of the Council of the EU, which started on January 1st. Innovation and equality are at the heart of the Spanish Presidency programme, explained Science and Innovation Minister Cristina Garmendia who added, “Promoting the construction of the ERA is key to the success of this programme. It is only by having a common shared space for knowledge, the ERA, in which scientists and ideas can move freely, that research and innovation will be able to act as engines for economic and social progress over the coming decades. For this reason, they should be at the heart of European Union policies.”

Spain has identified three “axes” to drive the ERA forward: integration, involvement and inclusion. The integration axis refers to the importance of integrating research and development (R&D) policies into other policies and specifically into the EU's strategy for 2020. Through the involvement axis, Spain will seek to ensure that all instruments supporting R&D and innovation in Europe, whether they are regional, national or pan-European in nature, address the major challenges faced by society today. These include climate change, the search for new sources of energy, ageing and disease, and globalisation. Finally, the inclusion axis focuses on the role science and innovation can play in promoting social cohesion and tackling poverty and exclusion.

Writing on CORDIS, the Spanish Presidency explains “Europe has the duty and the opportunity to lead the battle against inequality and to put science and technology to use in this fight”. Looked at more broadly, Spain's priorities for the next six months include: consolidating Europe's social agenda, paying special attention to gender equality and the fight against domestic violence; getting out of the economic crisis; energy security and climate change; creating a safer EU, particularly with regard to the challenge of immigration; and enabling Europe to speak with its own voice on the international scene. Spain will head up the EU Council for the first half of 2010, before handing over the reins to Belgium on July 1st.

Together with Hungary, which will hold the Presidency in the first half of 2011, Spain and Belgium have put together an 18-month work programme. In it, they promise to “take full account of the importance of research and development and innovation in the renewal of the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy”. In addition to the creation and governance of the ERA, priorities identified by the trio include the analysis of the mid-term review of the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) and the implementation of joint programming. In particular, the Presidencies are keen to emphasise the importance of the regional dimension of innovation and research policies.They also highlight the importance of making research careers more attractive and attracting the world's best brains to Europe.

The three nations pledge to closely follow the creation of the first knowledge and innovation communities (KICs) under the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). Finally, they say they will “closely monitor” progress on the development of the pan-European research infrastructures identified by the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI). Meanwhile, looking back on the Swedish Presidency, which ran for the second half of 2009, Sweden's Minister for Higher Education and Research, Tobias Krantz, commented, “It has been incredibly interesting to be allowed to lead a number of important processes during the autumn. Long-term issues cannot be solved in only a few months, but I have spoken to my Spanish counterpart and I have been given to understand that the Spanish Presidency will continue work on a lot of the issues that we have started. That feels good.”

Commissioner Promises “Action and Delivery” for Research, Innovation and Science

The European Commissioner designate for Research, Innovation and Science, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, pledged to move research, innovation and science “to the heart of European policy” in a hearing at the European Parliament. Speaking to the European Parliament's committees on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) and Culture and Education (CULT), the new Commissioner designate said that the European Union must become an Innovation Union. “Knowledge, research and scientific excellence is a cornerstone of innovation”, she stated. “In the new economy, refined knowledge will replace crude oil as the economy's prime motive force.”

During a confident performance, Mrs Geoghegan-Quinn said that if approved as Commissioner, her policies would focus on three main areas: completing the creation of the European Research Area (ERA), addressing societies' grand challenges, and creating an innovation research culture. In her opening speech, she also highlighted the importance of bringing more small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) into the EU's research programmes, and leveraging additional EU funds, such as the Structural Funds, for research. After the speech, the floor was thrown open to questions from the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), and during her grilling, Mrs Geoghegan- Quinn gave an idea of the kind of Commissioner she would be.

Asked whether she would be a Research Commissioner who comes up with the big idea or one who improves the instruments we have available, she replied forcefully: “I'm a politician, not a civil servant. I'm going to use the instruments that are already there to ensure that we deliver research to where it is needed.” Describing herself as “a doer”, she continued, “I will be robust in pushing this forward.” She concluded by expressing her desire for 'action and delivery”. Responding to a question on how she would obtain a large block of funding for research during the next round of EU budget negotiations, she said, “I'm up for the challenge. I've done it before in government. I will fight to get as much as I can.” In reply to a query on how she would attract more people to science she said, “We should make science sexy. Do we have celebrity scientists? We should have.”

Further reading

• Website of the Spanish Council Presidency: http://www.eu2010.es/

• Spanish Council Presidency pages on CORDIS: http://cordis.europa.eu/spain/presidency2010/home_en.html

• 18-month work programme of Spain, Belgium and Hungary:
http://www.eu2010.es/comun/descargas/ProyectoProgramaTrxo-16771.en09.pdf

ICT Profiles Supports R&D Players to Find Appropriate Partners

Austria has launched the new on-line directory called ICT profiles, which provides the user with a professional and entirely web-based platform for successful partner searches. ICT profiles allows its users to find collaboration partners with a focus on Information and Communication

Technology (ICT):

- In all relevant research areas (e.g. FP7);
- In commercial areas, and
- In governmental areas.

This directory enables R&D players from all over the world to review the R&D core competencies and publications of the Austrian Information and Communication Technology community. The clearly represented profiles inform the visitors about expertise, interests and aims of the organisation.

In order to ensure the continuous high quality of the database, all published profiles are updated on a regular basis. In the past few months approximately 300 Austrian R&D profiles have passed the quality check and were published by the Austrian ICT National Contact Point, who is also the operator of this database. A newly developed search mechanism allows expeditious searching or browsing through more than 60 different ICT sectors. In addition, a keyword search application is available, which is progressively filled up by the user and is monitored by an operator.

Interested parties benefit from this broad pool of R&D profiles for potential strategic partnerships and international R&D cooperation. Also, all previous involvements in EU funded projects of the potential partners and their contact details are published in detail on this database.ICT profiles is a free-of-charge on-line service and is operated by the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG), European and International Programmes Division.

Further Reading

• The European Parliament's hearings website: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/hearings

• European Commission website on the Commissioners designate:

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_designate_2009-2014/index_en.htm

Telemedicine Forum Seeks Contributors

The Telemedicine Forum at ePractice.eu is an initiative sponsored by the European Commission to help all practitioners involved in telemedicine services in Europe to meet and share their experiences and knowledge, and to ask and to provide support. The community is open to practitioners from European national and regional administrations, from public and private organisations, including stakeholders' representatives (i.e. patients, professionals, industry) and from academia. Involvement of regional/local telemedicine providers is particularly welcomed. Hopefully such a variety of stakeholders will provide different contributions, approaches and points of view.

The Telemedicine Forum is an open space to express opinions and exchange knowledge in which members are encouraged to provide contributions and participate in the discussions and events. It is not an official Commission site. The community is mainly focused on legal, organisational (including sustainability, business models) and technical aspects of telemedicine services.

Further Reading

- http://www.ictprofiles.at

Smart Personal Health: a European E-Health Project

Smart Personal Health is a new European Initiative to promote awareness about issues and challenges related to personal health systems interoperability, from technical to organisational and legal aspects.

More and more devices and applications are coming onto the market. They are often recommended by doctors and health insurers to help patients monitor their health and wellness. These “personal health systems” (PHS) are one of the key elements of the growth of European e-health. PHS will only realise their true potential if they are interoperable: a device from one vendor should work seamlessly together with another and other e-health applications.

Stakeholders must understand and support the challenges of personal health systems interoperability. These challenges are technical, organisational and legal.

The European Commission has called for action to support a wider understanding of interoperability amongst key stakeholders and has funded a Support Action to promote interoperability among personal health systems and to other e-health systems. The project Smart Personal Health started on January 1, 2010 and will run for one year.

Key activities of Smart Personal Health will include three thematically focused regional stakeholder workshops and one central pan-European PHS Interoperability Conference. Further networking and dialogue with healthcare providers, patients, industry, insurers, standard development organisations will be carried out. The Continua Health Alliance web portal will provide relevant information. The workshops and related networking will result in a report addressed to the European Commission highlighting the current status, concerns, barriers and incentives to accelerate the development and adoption of interoperable PHS systems. Recommendations for interoperability promotion will be proposed to the EC, national governments, stakeholder groups and industry.

The programme is run by Continua Health Alliance, IHE-Europe, ETSI and Empirica, coordinated by The Centre, and funded under European Commission's FP7 Programme.

Further Reading

- http://sph.continuaalliance.org

HL7 Transmits Genetic Results to EHR

Health Level Seven (HL7), the global interoperability standards body for healthcare IT, has announced that its messaging standard has successfully coded genetic test results from a lab and transmitted them to an electronic health record for the first time.

The HL7 Version 2 Implementation Guide details how to structure a genetic test result into the EHR using HL7 Version 2.5.1 and covers the reporting of genetic test results for sequencing and genotyping based tests.

The implementation guide was used by The Partners HealthCare Centre for Personalised Genetic Medicine (PCPGM) and the Intermountain Healthcare Clinical Genetics Institute to obtain genetic test results and transmit them directly through a computer interface from PCPGM to Intermountain Healthcare to the EHR.

Stan Huff, chief medical informatics officer for Intermountain Healthcare and HL7 board member, said: “The project is among the first in the country that will create a standardised advanced electronic patient record system containing genetic data.

“This may lead to electronic health records of the future, which would support treatment plans that are tailor made for each individual-right down to their DNA.”

Huff worked with PCPGM for 14 months to build the framework for receiving test results and integrating them into an EHR. At the same the time the Partners team also developed a lab reporting system that would create and send out the test results message through a centralised interface hub. Any lab or EHR that implements the HL7 standard can now interface with the hub.

Using the guide, Intermountain and Partners Healthcare are now working to make the genetic information available within the EHR, including clinical decision support, linkage to clinical genetic knowledge bases and drug order entry.

EU Funds Advances in Grid Computing

A team of European researchers from the KNOWARC ('Grid-enabled know-how sharing technology based on ARC services and open standards') project, which received almost three million euros in funding under the 'Information Society Technologies' (IST) Thematic area of the EU's Sixth Framework Programme (FP6), have developed a revolutionary middleware programme.

The advanced middleware enables computers running any operating system to access the distributed computers comprising the grid in a straightforward, cheaper and efficient manner. “Grid computing allows users to access the computing resources of many different machines distributed around the world,” said Prof. Farid Ould-Saada from the Department of Physics at the University of Oslo in Norway, and the coordinator of KNOWARC.

Professor Ould-Saada pointed out that with the new middleware, “Getting access to the grid should be as simple as installing a new browser to get on the internet”. KNOWARC project partners improved “advanced resource connector” (ARC) middleware currently available to users. ARC middleware provides interoperability between computing systems, architectures and platforms. ARC middleware will become the standard installation model for the popular Debian and Fedora distributions of open source operating system Linux, according to the researchers.

NORDUGRID, a grid research and development (R&D) venture designed and developed ARC, i.e. the 'free grid', middleware. The EGI_DS (European Grid Initiative Design Study) project, which has clinched 2.5 million euros under the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) has picked the software to be included in a sustainable European supergrid infrastructure.

Professor Ould-Saada concluded: 'In a matter of years, I hope to see resources and storage being as easy to access remotely as information is on the internet today.’

Further Reading

- KNOWARC: http://www.knowarc.eu
- ICT Results: http://cordis.europa.eu/ictresults

Published on : Mon, 4 Jan 2010