



Still Strong Potential for Better Efficiency and Quality through eHealth

- **The eHealth Action Plan has accelerated the implementation of eHealth in the EU member states**
- **Further EU programmes will enhance cross-border interoperability**

There is still a large potential for cost-savings and an improvement in quality through wider use of information and telecommunications technology (eHealth) in the health sector. This is the conclusion of a panel of experts at the 11th European Health Forum Gastein taking place from 1 to 4 October in Bad Hofgastein, Austria. The issue of innovation in coordinated care is a top priority at this congress.

“The eHealth Action Plan has sparked significant progress and the process of implementation of eHealth applications in the member states has become considerably quicker,” says Flora Giorgio of the DG Information Society and Media in the European Commission. “These applications already play a key role in the enhancement of quality and efficiency in health care, and there is potential for further improvement.” A few examples are the use of eHealth records to enhance the quality of care, e-prescription services and automatic alerts in the event non-compatible drugs are prescribed.

However, this is only a comparatively small portion of the opportunities, says Giorgio. EU co-funded research in the area of eHealth will continue to provide innovative solutions to meet the challenges healthcare systems are facing. With the following new initiatives, the EU Commission is aiming for new impulses in the implementation of eHealth in the EU member states:

- The recently adopted *"Commission Recommendation on Cross-Border Interoperability of Electronic Health Records Systems"*
- The planned *"Commission Communication on Telemedicine for the Benefit of Patients, Healthcare Systems and Society"*
- The projects co-funded under the Competitiveness and Innovative Programme
 - *The European Patients' Smart Open Service project, aimed at testing and validating interoperability of electronic health records and ePrescription solutions.*
 - *The CALLIOPE thematic network, aimed at building consensus and providing technical support for the implementation of interoperable eHealth solutions across Europe.*

The campaign in the area of eHealth also opens up opportunities for European companies. Paul Rübiger, MEP, president of the international SME lobby SME Global and co-founder of the task force SME Health, demands in particular the increased incorporation of SMEs in the development and implementation of eHealth applications: “There are countless European SMEs doing outstanding work in this area, some of which offer considerably more innovative

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solutions than the big IT companies.” SMEs can establish themselves in niche areas and play an excellent role here on a European and global level.

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