



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Brussels, 1 December 2004

15190/04

**SAN 193
SOC 557
COMPET 198
TELECOM 176**

NOTE

from : General Secretariat
to : Council

Subject : High Level Group on Health Services and Medical Care
- *Information from the Commission*

Delegations will find attached a note from the Commission on the above subject.

Extract on eHealth issues



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

HEALTH & CONSUMER PROTECTION DIRECTORATE-GENERAL

Brussels, 30 November 2004
HLG/2004/21 FINAL

HIGH LEVEL GROUP ON HEALTH SERVICES AND MEDICAL CARE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report of the patient mobility reflection process represented a political milestone by recognising the potential value of European cooperation in helping Member States to achieve their health objectives. The High Level Group on health services and medical care was established as a means of taking forward the recommendations made by the reflection process. The report from the High Level Group sets out progress at this stage and orientations for future work in 2005 and thereafter, and this summary highlights some key points from the report.

The High Level Group has taken forward work through working groups involving interested Member States on particular topics, with regular reporting of their work to the full High Level Group. Work has been taken forward in the following areas:

- **cross-border healthcare purchasing and provision:** Future work should focus on a deeper analysis of the financial impact and sustainability of cross-border healthcare, developing a framework that could be used for cross-border healthcare purchasing, studying the reasons for mobility and the need for purchasing care abroad, providing information to patients on quality, safety and continuity of care as well as on patients' rights and responsibilities, considering liability issues in cross-border care, and gathering information to monitor cross-border healthcare purchasing and provision. The European Commission should also be invited to support a conference in 2005 to exchange knowledge and best practice, focusing on legal and financial aspects;
- **health professionals:** work should be taken forward through exchanging information on continuing professional development to ensure quality; ensuring that basic data on migration of health professionals is provided by all Member States; surveying the impact of migration out of Member States; and sharing information on recruitment practices in order to assess whether common principles could be developed;

- **centres of reference:** some principles have been developed regarding European centres of reference, including their role in tackling rare diseases or other conditions requiring specialised care and volumes of patients and some criteria that such centres should fulfil. Options and procedures for designating European centres of reference for limited periods of time at European level based on agreed lists of pathologies, technologies and techniques are also being developed. The High Level Group will work towards a common approach which could then be implemented through pilot activities;

- **health technology assessment:** the usefulness of establishing a sustainable European health technology assessment network has been recognised. Such a network should address methods for developing common core information packages, methods to support transferability of assessments, methods for helping Member States to identify and prioritise topics and commissioning reports, tailoring common core information to national health policy processes and sharing methodologies, expertise and practice issues. This network could be established initially through the public health programme;

- **information and e-health:** e-health is the priority focus in this area, and its potential to add value to existing health services, improve quality and continuity of care and support citizen-oriented services - interoperability at national and European level is the cornerstone for achieving this. An overall health systems information strategy in a European context is needed, considering mobility of citizens and availability of Europe-wide e-health services. Future work will focus on developing such an information strategy and on outlining activities for the implementation of the e-Health Action Plan, looking at the information which should be available for patients, professionals and policy-makers; and looking at the appropriate structures for cooperation on information and e-health;

- **health impact assessment and health systems:** The European Union's impact on health takes place largely through policies other than those specifically related to public health. Work is required to ensure a coherent approach to evaluating the impact on health of other Community policies. However, there is no EU methodology to prospectively and systematically address the potential impacts of non-health policies on health systems. Work underway, including by other international organisations, should be drawn on to develop agreed instruments to measure impacts of non-health EU policies on health through impacts on health systems, which could then be tested for reliability and validity.

- **patient safety:** Health care interventions, although intended to benefit patients, may in some cases cause harm. An EU patient safety network or forum, working with other international organisations, could provide focus for efforts to improve the safety of care for patients in all EU Member States, through sharing information and expertise. If agreed, proposals for an EU patient safety network could be further developed during 2005.

[...]

Information and e-health (including data protection)

The working group has a broad mandate to examine information needs for citizens / patients, health professionals and authorities, which arise in the context of increasing cooperation between health systems and by movement of citizens or professionals. eHealth services can provide important possibilities to support mobility.

Mobility policies in Europe make health services relevant to the international market. Furthermore, eHealth services in principle can be offered world-wide via secure Internet-like networks. In this context, it shall be possible, for example, for a doctor to use a patient's electronic health record, if given secure access to it - perhaps using his / her electronic health card or an electronic passport. This, however may only be realised under conditions of interoperability.

The working group noted that a lack of standards and other issues of interoperability as well as concerns regarding security and privacy are hampering the development of European-wide eHealth services. There is a need for appropriate measures at the highest level to overcome the existing barriers.

European cooperation in eHealth brings added value to national health systems, improves quality of care and citizen oriented services.

The WG will address the need for an overall health systems information strategy in a European context. In addition to this, the working group shall review ongoing activities of relevance and comprise a continuous review mechanism for the eHealth action plan implementation process, taking into account national roadmaps and priorities.

Interoperability - both at national and at European level - is the corner stone to support patient centred care and mobility of citizens. The WG has set as first priority to focus on eHealth for the initial phase.

Issues addressed by the working group

This working group¹ has looked at the following issues.

First, developing an overall **health systems information strategy in a European context**, considering mobility of citizens and availability of Europe-wide or cross-border eHealth services, including the following issues:

- Information for citizens / patients,
- Information for health administrations / authorities,
- Information for healthcare professionals, considering new working methods, training and educational aspects,

¹ Chaired by Germany, with the participation of AT, CY, CZ, EE, EL, ES, FR, HU, IE, IT, NL, SE, SI.

- Data “following” the patient to optimize reimbursement processes, provision, treatment and care,

taking into account acceptance of new eHealth services by citizens and security / data protection issues.

Second, reviewing current work to identify issues, priorities and potential support mechanisms to establish eHealth services supporting citizens` mobility and define suitable indicators to compare health systems services and to monitor the impact of the EU on health systems.

Third, defining a continuous review process of the EC Communication on eHealth (COM(2004)356 final)) “e-Health – making healthcare better for European citizens: **An action plan for a European e-Health Area**” to implement it, update it, add flexibility, anchor it on concrete national and cross-border activities, and define further actions especially in support of patient mobility. In connection to this, priority shall be given to appropriate measures, at the highest level, to facilitate agreement on the use of standards for interoperability, building trust in the confidentiality of such services and resolving all other issues of interoperability.

Fourth, **establishing well structured European-wide cooperation** between Member States, EC and stakeholders for the implementation of interoperable eHealth services and necessary electronic secure infrastructures as a permanent mechanism.

The working group has discussed and commented on the Communication on eHealth (COM(2004)356 final). It is of high priority to define further activities for its implementation, including resources, and organizational structures.

Contributions expected and relation to other activities

As a first activity, the WG will identify on going relevant activities and will establish appropriate links in order to import information and results of significance. Examples of such initiatives are the European Health Telematics Association (EHTEL)- , the eTEN project Netc@rds (a pilot for a European Health Insurance Card), other relevant upcoming projects in the eTEN or 6./7. Framework Programme and the announced report of the eHealth Standardization Focus Group, which is hosted by CEN/ISSS and funded by the Commission. Furthermore, coordination of work with organizations receiving and analyzing statistical data on the health systems is needed to avoid duplication of work.

As set out in COM(2004) 301, work is already underway to improve information on patient mobility and mobility of health professionals at European level. This is being taken forward in particular through the health systems working party that has been set up under the first strand of the public health programme.

Plans for work in the future

Priority is given to outline such activities for the implementation of the eHealth Action Plan that need cooperation between the Member States and support by the EC.

The working group will therefore propose an overall health systems information strategy and will outline a work plan for 2005 and the following years, taking into account all other

issues such as dealing with the targets of the Public Health Programme. All activities should be based on an overall information strategy and on political targets

Further work in this area should also look at the information which should be available for patients, professionals and policy-makers. Besides this, data for comparison of eHealth services to measure effects of European integration should be defined. Concrete activities – to be coordinated by the WG - will follow.

A challenge will be to set up an appropriate organizational structure and secure the needed financial resources for an effective cooperation of the Member States and the European Commission in pursuit of the above objectives. At the same time, healthcare authorities (supported by the Commission and cooperating with relevant stakeholders) have to take the lead in facilitating the realisation of European-wide or cross-border eHealth services within the framework of a commonly accepted eHealth Action Plan,. The High Level Group can play a politically-oriented coordination role in this process.

[...]