

Abstract

Day 3, International Day – Afternoon Session – National Strategies in Centralised and Federal State Systems

Dr. José Luis Monteagudo, Ministry of Health and Consumption, Spain

eHealth in Spain: current situation and major trends

Similarly to other European countries, the Spanish healthcare system is undergoing a large process of change. Now, a completely new administrative scenario has emerged after the total transfer of the healthcare competences from the State to the 17 Autonomous Communities. This new model is regulated by the Law 16/2003 of 28th May on “Cohesion and Quality of the National Health System” that specifies national coordination framework under the three basic principles of equity of access; quality guaranty, and citizens participation.

The current situation reflects the revolutionary effect of the transition to the new scenario where different regional policies and strategies co-exist jointly with central Ministry activity. Sharing a common vision, general efforts are directed to promote patient centered care, decentralization of services, re-engineering of processes and giving to professionals more autonomy and responsibility. In this context, health telematics appears as a basic resource and a companion of modernization plans. Thus, it has become a strategic tool for health care organizations and consequently the center of leading actuations to gain visibility to the citizens on modernization and improvement of the healthcare services. Regarding basic data connectivity infrastructure, most regional authorities are very active on networking healthcare facilities and implementing eHealth applications to facilitate patient data to seamless flow through the healthcare system, supporting continuity of care, saving time of health professionals and patients, and making more efficient use of information resources.

Web-based information systems for both, citizens and professionals, represent an increasing number of projects intended for high social relevance. The growing rate of adoption of wide band access (ADSL, Cable) to Internet by general population, is paving the way to the potential growth of eHealth applications for the consumers in the next future.

Traditional “old” hospitals have been or are involved in intensive modernization plans, being Information Technologies a component of the strategy for the change. In addition, the new generation of emergent hospitals is making intensive use of advanced information technology as a distinctive flag. Several of them are already operating as “paperless hospitals” serving as practical test beds for evaluating the capabilities of advanced health ICT applications. A general policy is to provide connectivity at the Health Area linking the reference hospital with all the primary care centres and other health resources in the area. There is a strong demand for integrated solutions to enable distributed services allowing continuity of care between primary care and hospitals. A basic functionality is to allow real time sharing of patient healthcare records. Different implementations are already operative in different regions, some of them in large scale.

Abstract

It must be mentioned, that the growing implantation of digital imaging technologies represents a silent revolution in the healthcare system. It seems that the cultural, technical and economic barriers, that have been hampering the introduction of PACS and digital radiology during last decade, are rapidly decreasing. Teleradiology is extending their number of installations and there are advanced implementations to support extended diagnostic capabilities to entire regional health systems.

National Electronic Health Card and Electronic Prescription are priority themes of the Ministry of Health. Both topics are in the agenda of discussion with the Autonomous Communities to search for consensus on a common approach. Telemedicine and Home Care applications are increasingly being implemented for daily use at a growing number of Healthcare Services. Concerning the ICT adoption by professionals it is noted that the Healthcare System in Spain support a very important volume of clinical researchers that make use of advanced computing systems, and accounts for a considerable usage of Internet services facilitating continuous training and access to medical literature and scientific knowledge. Health research is supported by central policy managed through Institute of Health Carlos III. Internet technologies are actually supporting the strategy of National Cooperative Research Networks Programme put in work this year.

Obviously, the deployment of healthcare telematics in Spain must face a number of barriers. Resistances vary depending on the different situations and the nature of the applications. In general, it is common to claim the existence of administrative constraints; lack of legal provisions; resistance to change, and economic limitations.

The issue of legal responsibility linked to patient data security and confidentiality has become a matter of growing preoccupation for health professionals. Change management is a key element in all plans concerning eHealth deployment that quite often does not receive the required attention. In this context, education and training of healthcare professionals is one of the major challenges to afford. Growing number of e-learning programmes are under scrutiny to assess consolidation as a viable alternative. It exists an important initiative for advanced training systems using simulators and other ICT tools. Like in other countries, there is a growing pressure to evaluate cost-benefit ratio of telematics applications. Efforts are actually being directed to improve assessment data.

Compatibility and interoperability of information and communication technologies between the different regional health care systems in Spain is a major issue. It is a theme of high priority at national level. Certainly, the variety of implementation environments poses many problems to interoperability. Further, the national environment now compromises the possibility of international transferability. The adoption of a common standards approach is one pending task at national agenda. In this context, both the authoritative role of the European Commission and the cooperation with other European countries might have positive cohesive impact. Nevertheless the feasibility of a European telematics strategy, or member states strategies that might be coordinated at

Abstract

the European level, should take into consideration a proper approach and a realistic timescale to match with different local status, capabilities and real needs.