



## **eHealth Requires Harmonisation Across Europe**

- **Lack of uniform technology threatens (costly) barriers**
- **The EU's eHealth Action Plan is to be implemented by 2010**
- **Numerous diverse approaches in the EU member states**

The electronisation of health care systems is running at full speed now in virtually all European states. Whether it is for administrative procedures, electronic prescriptions or the use of chip cards as replacement for conventional administrative systems, national health officials everywhere anticipate considerable savings.

In a conference of experts held on the topic of eHealth at the European Health Forum Gastein, the biggest health policy event in the EU, the chances for this development were underscored, though experts also warned of several problems. "If international harmonisation of the systems is not intensively undertaken, particularly within the European Union, then the organisation of health services by chip card will pose major difficulties," warns Reinhold Mainz, chip card expert in the German Ministry of Health. As a result of the increasing mobility of Europeans, it is natural that health services will be more frequently consumed. While "paper can still be sent from one country to another, basically insurmountable hurdles are being created as a result of incompatible electronic systems."

The magic word is "interoperability". This means that either the chip card can be used abroad or that communication between the systems is possible without restriction. The efforts at establishing this common basis are bundled into the "eHealth Action Plan". During the length of the programme, which last until 2010, uniform patient identification systems, the basis for transmission of electronic health data as well as uniform quality standards for eHealth products and services are to be established. In addition to technical harmonisation, however, harmonising the legal frameworks is also of major importance.

A pressure group for EU-wide standardisation already exists: in 2004 Germany, Austria, France, Norway, Slovakia and the Netherlands established the Interoperability Initiative for a European eHealth Area".

That time is pressing demonstrates the diversity of the eHealth programmes currently underway throughout the EU. "Particularly in the new EU states, projects from the Baltic States to Hungary and on to Slovenia are in high gear," says Gérard Comyn, head of the EU Commission division "ICT for Health". "To even a larger extent than member countries in the west, these states can make enormous progress in quality, customer friendliness and cost-efficiency as a result of eHealth."

***Further information and abstracts of lectures from Forum 2 / eHealth:***

EHFG Press Office:

Tel.: 06434 30057, E-Mail: [ehfg@mbdialog.at](mailto:ehfg@mbdialog.at)

**Further press information and illustrative material on the EHFG are found at**  
[www.ehfg.org](http://www.ehfg.org)