Making the eHealth Connections - Telemedicine/eHealth Structures and Initiatives

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ABSTRACT, РЕЗЮМЕ

The paper outlines in brief the significant role of two international initiatives - the International Society for Telemedicine and eHealth (ISfTeH, www.isfteh.org) and The International Educational and Networking Forum for eHealth, Telemedicine and Health ICT (Med-e-Tel, www.medetel.eu) for the global application of Telemedicine/eHealth. Revealing various aspects of ISfTeH and Med-e-Tel activities, the paper illustrates how they support medical and ICT specialists (Ukr.z.telemed.med.telemat.-2012.-Vol.10,№1.-P.13-17).

Key words: networking, international structures, global telemedicine/eHealth

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НАЛАЖИВАНИЕ ПАРТНЕРСТВ - ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ И ИНИЦИАТИВЫ В СФЕРЕ ТЕЛЕМЕДИЦИНЫ И ЭЛЕКТРОННОГО ЗДРАВООХРАНЕНИЯ

International Society for Telemedicine & eHealth[1], Zurich, Switzerland, Med-e-Tel Forum[2], Luxembourg, Luxembourg, Space Research & Technology Institute of Bulgarian Academy of Sciences [3], Sophia, Bulgaria

Статья описывает важную роль международных инициатив - International Society for Telemedicine and eHealth (ISfTeH, www.isfteh.org) и Международного научно-образовательного форума электронного здравоохранения, телемедицины и медицинских ИТ Med-e-Tel (Med-e-Tel, www.medetel.eu) – в организации и развитии телемедицины и электронного здравоохранения в глобальном масштабе. Представляя различные аспекты деятельности ISfTeH и Med-e-Tel авторы демонстрируют возможности широкой поддержки медицинских и технических специалистов (Укр.ж.телемед.мед.телемат.-2012.-Т.10,№1.-С.13-17).

Ключевые слова: взаимодействие, международные структуры, телемедицина и электронное здравоохранение в мировом масштабе

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НАЛАГОДЖЕННЯ ПАРТНЕРСТВ - ОРГАНІЗАЦІЇ Й ІНІЦІАТИВИ В СФЕРІ ТЕЛЕМЕДИЦИНИ Й ЕЛЕКТРОННОЇ ОХОРОНИ ЗДОРОВ'Я

International Society for Telemedicine & eHealth[1], Zurich, Switzerland, Med-e-Tel Forum[2], Luxembourg, Luxembourg, Space Research & Technology Institute of Bulgarian Academy of Sciences [3], Sophia, Bulgaria

Стаття описує важливу роль міжнародних ініціатив - International Society for Telemedicine and eHealth (ISfTeH, www.isfteh.org) і Міжнародного науково-освітнього форуму електронної охорони здоров'я, телемедицини й медичних ІТ Med-e-Tel (Med-e-Tel, www.medetel.eu) – в організації й розвитку телемедицини й електронної охорони здоров'я в глобальному масштабі. Представляючи різні аспекти діяльності ISfTeH і Med-e-Tel, автори демонструють можливості широкої підтримки медичних і технічних фахівців (Укр.ж.телемед.мед.телемат.-2012.-Т.10,№1.-С.13-17).

Ключові слова: взаємодія, міжнародні структури, телемедицина й електронна охорона здоров'я у світовому масштабі

Global Telemedicine/eHealth Implementation. What is the current situation regarding Telemedicine and eHealth implementation worldwide? Thousands of papers, reports and presentations are published annually. Each of them provides a glimpse at the telemedicine application in a

region, country or community. One of the most extensive surveys performed recently is the WHO Global eHealth Observatory [9,10]. Its goal was to obtain general information about the state of eHealth among WHO Member States. The results from 114 countries covering 81% of the world's population revealed that 4 areas of Telemedicine/eHealth are implemented with a priority - teleradiology, telepathology, teledermatology and telepsychiatry. The provision of these 4 services is far less advanced in upper-middle, lower-middle and low-income countries than in high-income countries. The African and Eastern Mediterranean Regions generally had the lowest proportion of countries with established telemedicine services. As far as applications of mobile health technologies (mHealth) are concerned, the four most frequently applied services are: health call centers (59%), emergency toll-free telephone services (55%), managing emergencies and disasters (54%), and mobile telemedicine (49%). Yet, with the exception of health call centers, approximately two thirds of mHealth services are still in the pilot or informal stage.

Consistent with Telemedicine/eHealth general trends, higher-income countries are more active in implementation of mHealth than lower-income countries. Countries in the European Region are, as per fall 2009, the most active and those in the African Region the least active [10].

In sum, despite of the significant funds and efforts dedicated to the development of Telemedicine/eHealth services they are not as widely implemented as it could expect. And this is not because these services are not needed. Time proved that telemedicine can help solving the healthcare dilemmas or at least offering the means to do so [4-6].

Scientific studies also exposed the increasing acceptance of Telemedicine/eHealth applications in various areas of health care such as chronic heart failure, wound care, psychiatry, psychology, surgery, chronic disease and care for elderly and house bound patients, mobile eHealth solutions [3-6], etc. Cost effectiveness of eHealth applications is confirmed, too [1,2,4,8]. Experts admit that Telemedicine/eHealth has a vast and still unrealized potential. The question then is what hinders the wide implementation of Telemedicine/eHealth.

Barriers

Experimental data and literature reviews support that the 10 most common barriers to implementation of telemedicine services are as follows: cost, legal and cultural issues, lack of infrastructure, lack of demand for such services, lack of adequate policy at national level, low or no priority for Telemedicine in healthcare development as well as lack of knowledge, experts and standards [7,9]. While there is an agreement that these are the main obstacles, for the different communities the rank of the barriers differs. Developing countries are more likely to consider financial issues such as high costs of equipment or running the service, the inadequate infrastructure and the lack of technical expertise to be the most significant. Developed countries are more likely to consider legal issues, data privacy and confidentiality as the most important. While for the African countries the 4 top barriers are the perception that costs of telemedicine are too high, the lack of infrastructure and organizational culture and national policy in telemedicine, for the European countries the top 4 obstructions are missing legislation, costs, insufficient organization culture and missing standards. Thus, the future of Telemedicine/eHealth depends on overcoming the various challenges such as license, legislation, ethics and standards.

International Initiatives

Let's focus on two specific networking enabling initiatives and what they are offering to those that are either working in the field of eHealth or are planning to develop eHealth services.

The International Society for Telemedicine and eHealth

The International Society for Telemedicine and eHealth (ISfTeH, www.isft.net) is a not-for profit membership organization of national, regional, international associations and others, institutions, organizations, corporations, individuals, students and nurses, established under Swiss law. ISfTeH is the international representative body of national and international Telemedicine and eHealth

organizations and is dedicated to broadly promoting Telemedicine/eHealth around the world. ISfTeH supports the startup of National Associations or Societies and facilitates their international contacts. Its aim is to disseminate knowledge, information and experience and to provide access to recognized experts in the eHealth field worldwide. Initiatives focused on widely implementation of Telemedicine/eHealth are:

1. The *Global eHealth Ambassadors Program* (GeHAP). Its start up is supported by the Rockefeller Foundation and the Gulbenkian Foundation. The purpose of the program is to raise the profile of eHealth worldwide, through advocacy activities. Advocacy plays a particularly important role within the broad framework of using ICT to strengthen health systems, especially in the Global South. Chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the eHealth Ambassadors are globally recognized personalities who serve as high-level advocates for eHealth. They articulate consistent, ethical and evidence-based policy and advocacy positions with regard to the use of ICT in health, promote the development of integrated eHealth systems in countries; and advocate a higher profile for eHealth in health development activities, country budgets, bi-, and multi-lateral partnerships, and aid and development programs. As per fall of 2011 the eHealth Ambassadors are: Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu; Prof. Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Former President of Brazil; Dr. Emilio Rui Vilar, President of the Gulbenkian Foundation; Lord Nigel Crisp, former CEO of the NHS, UK; Peter Gabriel, Eminent musician and Strive Masiyiwa, Founder and CEO, Econet Wireless Group.

2. As part of ISfTeH educational activity, a *Working Group "Education"* is also functioning. The mission of this Committee chaired by Prof. M. Mars from South Africa is to list existing programs on eHealth; to establish basic eHealth templates for fundamental training programs; to coordinate eHealth educational efforts around the Globe; to assist the setup of new courses in eHealth and to define the needs of universities and specialists for basic and continuous education. 3. The ISfTeH *Students' Working Group* aims to promote a free of charge

participation of students (up to MSc degree) in Telemedicine and e-Health conferences and other related initiatives, as well as providing access to recognized experts in the field worldwide. The involvement of a new generation of professionals is considered a key component towards a successful implementation of new technologies in health assistance and education.

Since 2008, thanks to a partnership established between the ISfTeH and Blackboard (former Elluminate®), a free of charge license allows the ISfTeH Students' Working Group to organize live web conferencing sessions for its student members. The sessions comprises of 5 students' presentations (around 10min, with 5-10 power-point slides), made via Blackboard. A Jury, composed of 3 distinguished and honorable eHealth professionals, traditionally elects the best students' presentation.

4. The goal of the ISfTeH *Telenursing Working Group* is to provide a forum for exchange of knowledge and experiences of nurses and others nurses supporters using eHealth applications. The Group advocates for increased use and evaluation of telehealth services by nurses and stimulates innovative ideas and promotes initiatives for further development of eHealth. It also supports the advance nurses' knowledge and skills in telehealth through dissemination of research findings, practice guidelines and education programs including virtual education sessions.

5. Collaborative Care Team in Open Source aims to share technical know-how about software including source code, i.e. in Open Source. More about this initiative and its projects is available at http://www.isfteh.org/working_groups/categor y/collaborative_care_team_in_open_source.

The International eHealth, Telemedicine and Health ICT Forum for Education, Networking and Business:

eHealth science, practice and market need a meeting place. Such a place is Med-e-Tel (The International eHealth, Telemedicine and Health ICT Forum for Education, Networking and Business, www.medetel.elu). Med-e-Tel is the yearly official event of the ISfTeH. It is a highly

specialized event that brings suppliers of specific equipment and service providers together with buyers, healthcare professionals, decision makers and policy makers from many countries around the globe and provides them with hands-on experience and knowledge about currently available products, technologies and applications. Med-e-Tel is a forum where state-of-the-art products, ideas, projects, etc. are presented and discussed. Year after year it became a nesting place for new co-operation and partnerships between scientific groups and institutions, small, medium and large size enterprises, from all over the world. Annual editions called together participant from over 50 countries. WHO, EC, ESA, ITU, UNOOSA, are only part of the major players that took part in the event.

Med-e-Tel takes place in Luxembourg in April and follows a standard format including exhibition, scientific program and media corner. It provides lots of educational opportunities through its extensive program of presentations, panel discussions, workshops and satellite symposia. Since 2007 it is accredited by the European Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (EACCME) to provide European external CME credits for medical specialists. EACCME credits are recognized by the American Medical Association as well as by some countries in Asia and Middle East. This is the highest possible recognition of the extreme value of Med-e-Tel's Education program.

ISfTeH and Med-e-Tel are the two side of the coin. They facilitate telemedicine implementation all over the world via a series of activities such as:
• Creation and updating of the Global Knowledge Resources Centre for Telemedicine & eHealth – free access high quality database including not only books but over 2500 abstracts, PowerPoint presentations and papers, searchable by year, country and topic, and also including specific section for evidence based telemedicine/Telehealth;
• Organization of basic training courses in Telemedicine/eHealth;
• Publication of Electronic Telemedicine/eHealth Journal since 2012;
• Assisting networking and supporting events all over the world, enabling the participants to access practical information at first hand;
• Organizing high quality continuous medical education for medical specialist;
• Supporting the education and contacts of students via virtual sessions and student working group;
• Assisting the professional career of nurses via virtual sessions and telenursing working group;
• Promoting research and participation on eHealth in developing countries via award grants in cooperation with EC;
• Disseminating Open source applications in health and many more.

Thus both ISfTeH and Med-e-Tel lead the way from needs to practical applications, highlight quantitative numbers and results, serve networking – meeting and dealing with real people, real business, real achievements, real products, real problems, provide education for business , science, practitioners and citizens. ISfTeH and especially Med-e-Tel are the perfect organizations to follow-up on what is globally going on and what the new trends in the area of eHealth are.

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