



SUPPORT FOR THE HEALTH
WORKFORCE PLANNING AND
FORECASTING EXPERT NETWORK

EXPERT NETWORK 7TH WEBINAR – SUMMARY REPORT

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The contract is signed with the joint tender led by Semmelweis University (SU), and further partners are KU Leuven (KUL), the Italian National Agency for Regional Health Services (AGENAS), the Italian Ministry of Health (MDS) and the Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME).

INTRODUCTION

On 5 December 2019, the joint tender [‘Support for the Health Workforce Planning and Forecasting Expert Network’ \(SEPEN\)](#) organised its seventh webinar for the expert network. This edition focused on *‘The digital transformation and digital skills of the health workforce’*. The webinar was moderated by Ms Sarada Das.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

The webinar was opened with a presentation by **Mr Clayton Hamilton** from the Division of Health Systems and Public Health at World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe and responsible for leading the initiative on Digitalisation of Health Systems. He explained that despite Member States’ different points of departure all shared the common objective of achieving universal health coverage (UHC). The importance of digitalisation in this process was recently reaffirmed by the World Health Assembly and enshrined in the WHO Global Strategy on Digital Health. The strategy will support governments in navigating the digital transformation and offering support suited to countries’ specific needs. WHO-Europe already hosts a number of ongoing initiatives which are contributing to the development of comprehensive digital health policies, addressing i.a. health information including the development and use of mobile Health (mHealth), or the feasibility of using benchmarks for the standardized assessment of artificial intelligence (AI) for health solutions within WHO-ITU Focus Group on AI4Health. WHO-Europe identified key digital health challenges in Europe including health workforce engagement and training. Discussions are moving towards an understanding that digitalisation will not mean ‘more of the same, but faster’ but catalyses a paradigm shift around the roles of patients, health professionals, and data. As European countries have many common goals within digital health as digitalising health information or addressing privacy and security, the ones of more advanced countries include creating biobanks and personalised medicine, establishing big data initiatives or implementing blockchain-based solutions. In all processes, topics such as governance, financing and interoperability of digital health are highlighted as frequent challenges. One of the key projects are the digital skills of the workforce, its changing responsibilities and its role leveraging data.

As leader of the work on eSkills for professionals carried out in the 3rd Joint Action supporting the eHealth Network (eHAction), **Ms Linda Keane** from the Irish Computer Society, zoomed in on this aspect of the digital transformation. She illustrated the current mismatch of eSkills and expectations as for example established in a [2019 study of the European Medical Students’ Association \(EMSA\) on digital health and medical education](#). The large majority of surveyed health professionals reported to have received no training, or insufficient training, in digital health technology. To support the improvement of the health workforce’s digital literacy, the eHAction is building on existing competence frameworks, including the European eCompetence Framework, the Health Information Technology Competences project, and the Joint Action to support the eHealth Network (JAseHN). The consolidation of this work has resulted in a demo version of ‘Careers Plus’, an interactive website which enables professionals to self-asses their current skills level and identify skills gaps and training needs according to their specific job profile. The website is currently being piloted and user feedback is integrated into future updates. It has also identified a key challenge: it is difficult to be aware of the limits of one’s own knowledge, i.e. ‘we do not know what we do not know’. The eHAction is conscious the need to tailor eSkills to individual

professionals both in content and format and will continue to develop Career Plus accordingly.

To complement these presentations, **Ms Kaisa Immonen**, Director of Policy at the European Patients Forum, and **Dr Piret Väli**, Vice-President and the Chair of the WG eHealth at Council of European Dentists, shared commentaries. Ms Immonen proposed that patients should not be recipients of solutions but involved in the creating digital policies. She reflected on how the time patients spend in self-care greatly exceeds the time spent in healthcare provided by health professionals. Digital tools can facilitate the link between the two and improve coordination between patients and professionals as well as professionals themselves. This requires skills development, including multi-professional training, and patient involvement.

Dr Piret Väli agreed with Ms Immonen for the emphasis on real-life patient centred care, proposing that digital tools, such as ePrescriptions, are an example of delivering added value. Two points are central in her view: the patient-doctor relationship must always be based on trust, regardless of the tools which are used in its exercise. Second, she sees a need not only among health professionals but society in general to improve digital literacy and learn about concept such as digital hygiene. To achieve this there must be also a financial commitment to sustainable investment. Only then will be benefits of the digital transformation be accomplished.

A short discussion followed which looked into patients and health professionals' motivation in acquiring eSkills. As coordinators of the new EU Health Policy Platform thematic network on profiling and training the health care workers of the future led by Health First Europe and the European Health Management Association (EHMA), Ms Lucia Medori, and Mr Michele Calabro, presented the thematic network and invited interested parties to join.

Moreover, **Maria Teresa Parisotto** representing European Specialist Nurses Organisations, stressed that while digital solution can increase quality of care, the focus of digital transformation should be on improving a patient-doctor relationship. Having additional time to spend with patients, does not have to automatically translate into better contact with patients, as the quality of interactions is of key importance.

To wrap up, **Ms Das** thanked all speakers and participants for the thoughtful exchange. It was announced that the final SEPEN workshop will continue the discussion on the digital transformation and experts were invited to participate in the online poll to determine the focus topic. The SEPEN webinar series will be continued in 2020.