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PRESS RELEASE

eHealth Week 2010: Do We Need Patient Portals?

BRUSSELS (9 March 2010) - Wikipedia defines Patient Portals as healthcare-related online applications that allow patients to interact & communicate with their healthcare providers, such as physicians, hospitals and pharmaceutical companies.

The upcoming eHealth week 2010 in Barcelona will focus on a range of topics, one of them being patient portals. Therefore, we asked one of eHealth week's speakers; Miguel Cabrer, Founder of Medting.com, to give us his view on the topic.

In your opinion, what are the advantages of patient portals for patients?

Besides having direct access to doctors and/or healthcare providers, patients also have immediate access to all the necessary information that an online portal can provide. The patients feels like they are connected 24/7 with their doctor without having to make an appointment and traveling to see a healthcare professional.

So what are the advantages for physicians and hospitals?

The healthcare providers can monitor their patient's activities much more closely. By being in regular contact with your patient, you do not only create a more personal and trustworthy rapport with your patient; you also have access to much more accurate information about them. Patient portals are a novel way to offer new and more modern services like online second opinions.

What exactly do patient portals offer in terms of services?

If you think about how much time and administration goes into just booking an appointment with your doctor, being referred to a specialist, etc., then I think any user

will be relieved by having the option of doing all this online, whenever it suits. Not to mention actually being able to consult your doctor online.

Think about how easy it would be not having to wait on the phone to make an appointment and then spend time in a waiting room, filled with other sick people. Web based healthcare applications can without a doubt save a lot of time and administration but I believe the challenges we need to focus on are: providing access to medical records, monitoring chronic, second opinions with patients, etc.

We are for example developing a project for an international reference hospital willing to offer the second opinions directly to patients. The challenge here is to get the information properly and accurately, organized by patients.

How should we encourage patients to update their personal files?

That is one of the key challenges to make patient portals a success. We need an incentive to motivate patients to be active and efficient even when they are not ill. I was personally involved in a Medical Tourism project where we were exposed to some great incentives for tourists to keep an updated medical record online, which is especially important if they suffer from chronic diseases.

Where do you draw the line between electronic medical records and personal health records?

When I was involved in EMR implementation we had a clear definition of “subjective information” in EMR’s, which includes personal opinions and medical uncertainties. This information was considered as intellectual property of the doctor. The “objective information” is the final output such as lab results, images, discharge letters, etc., which is what the patients have the right to access and should be available in a PHR. Moreover, the PHR would have to be an accurate summary of patient’s clinical situation.

What are the security issues? How should we deal with privacy rules?

Privacy and security are big concerns and high priority issues. Patients want to keep their information safe but at the same time patients would like to ensure it is accessible

when needed. We implemented an anonymous way to manage the PHR in the Medical Tourism Project, which I believe was a good approach.

What is the current situation of patient portals in Europe?

I know some projects in Spain and the Balearic islands and these are really interesting initiatives. There will be more and similar initiatives throughout Europe, but my feeling is that due to different healthcare systems, patients portals are more extended in the US under insurance companies.

How should we deal with drugs and disease related platforms set up by pharmaceutical companies?

These types of sites exist. What is necessary is that patients are able to recognize the type of site they are visiting. That is something patients have to be educated about and learn how to deal with. The same is happening for professionals due to the vast number of healthcare related websites. The conclusion is that eHealth is changing the way patients and doctors manage the relationship.

As a last thing, I just want to mention some sites of interest.

- CHRONIOUS (www.chronious.eu): an open platform to manage and monitor patients with chronic diseases during their daily life through the implementation and deployment of a platform that will be worn by patients.
- Patients Like Me (www.patientslikeme.com) is a website which connect people with similar diseases, so that they can share experiences and feedback.

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Media Registration

Journalists have access to all sessions from March 16 - 18, the exhibition floor and the Interoperability showcase. Please request for your free media pass, by clicking [here>>](#)

A ministerial press conference will be held on March 15th. Press cards are obligatory for access. A dedicated press area will be available on site.

About the High Level eHealth Conference 2010:

Co-organised by the forthcoming Spanish Presidency of the European Union and by the European Commission, with the cooperation of the Regional Government of Catalonia and the Foundation TicSalut, the High Level eHealth Conference 2010 is a ministerial event, representing since 2003 an important annual milestone in the field of ICT for healthcare. The conference theme of this 8th edition – “eHealth for Sustainable Healthcare Delivery: global challenges through local actions” – acknowledges the pressing perspective of a rapidly ageing European society, where the progressively extended life expectancy and the consequent increase in the prevalence of chronic diseases are globally posing serious challenges to the sustainability of national health systems. The conference will present how and why eHealth can make the difference in facing such a global challenge. Visit www.ehealthweek2010.org for more information.

About the World of Health IT Conference & Exhibition:

The World of Health IT Conference & Exhibition is the leading forum for the advancement of Health IT in Europe. Addressing the needs of key stakeholders in the European eHealth Community, The World of Health IT Conference & Exhibition offers professional development sessions, vendor exhibitions, best practice exchanges, networking sessions, and debates and discussions on the issues that will shape the future of eHealth. The WoHIT Organising Committee comprises the EC (European Commission), HIMSS (Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society), EUROREC (European Institute for Health Records), COCIR (European Coordination Committee of the Radiological, Electromedical and Healthcare IT Industry), EHTEL (European Health Telematics Association) and EFMI (European Federation for Medical Informatics). Since its inception in 2006, WoHIT has welcomed over 5,000 attendees and 180 exhibitors from over 60 countries throughout Europe and Worldwide. Visit www.worldofhealthit.org for more information.

About IHE:

Integrating the Healthcare Enterprise® (IHE, <http://www.ihe.net>) is a joint initiative by healthcare professionals and industry to improve the way computer systems in healthcare share information. Systems developed in accordance with IHE communicate with one another better, are easier to implement, and enable care providers to use information more effectively.

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