

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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## **“Don't Delay eHealth” advises Health First Europe**

- **Commission's Recommendation on interoperability due tomorrow**
- **eHealth development goes with further investment in the training of healthcare professionals.**

**Brussels, 1 July 2008** – Health First Europe calls today on the European Union to facilitate the development and integration of eHealth into the provision of day-to-day healthcare services. The announcement comes on the eve of the Commission's highly anticipated Recommendation on interoperability, defined as “the connecting of healthcare workers, systems and services”, which is crucial for quality European healthcare.

eHealth has become a major topic on the EU health agenda with decision-makers trying to develop patient-centred healthcare while making best use of resources. eHealth, in this context, appears to be a promising tool to empower patients while at the same time freeing up scarce resources. Indeed, with home-based monitoring alone, hospital admission rates have been reduced by 21% and mortality by 20%. Although these figures do not represent the only indicators of health, they do give a good idea of what eHealth can bring.

Patients already use eHealth on a regular basis for their interaction with health professionals. Some e-procedures definitely make things easier for patients and health professionals, amongst others, since the use of such procedures reduces the administrative burden for instance. eHealth can indeed help free up additional time for healthcare professionals to dedicate to the important face to face interactions that are so highly appreciated by patients. But eHealth can also help reducing the number of hospital visits needed to monitor a patient's condition. Telemonitoring and telenursing make the monitoring of the treatment of patients easier, giving patients more flexibility and autonomy while safeguarding quality healthcare. However, as the European Commission highlights, eHealth is a tool, it represents part of the solution, but it is not the panacea!

eHealth indeed needs to be seen as an element of a global health strategy along with the essential role of healthcare professionals, hospital managers, the medical technology industry and other stakeholders. The development of quality healthcare in Europe can only be achieved by coordinating everyone's efforts and with healthcare professionals working hand-in-hand with new modes of healthcare.

eHealth offers promising perspectives for both patients and healthcare professionals but it cannot develop without further investment in healthcare professionals themselves. They will always remain the most important element in the provision of healthcare services, which include the diagnosis, care and treatment of patients. eHealth is there to facilitate their job, to improve overall efficiency of healthcare systems. In



order to gain the full benefits of eHealth, it is therefore necessary to train healthcare professionals in the use of the relevant eHealth tools and increase patients' acceptance of these new modes of healthcare.

The upcoming Recommendation on interoperability is a hot talking point amongst healthcare professionals. For now, eHealth development is weakened by a lack of harmonised standards and by legal uncertainties. The Commission's Recommendation will certainly support interoperability, but it is not clear to what degree.

Health First Europe is a firm believer in the merits of eHealth, having participated in the Slovenian Presidency's conference on the subject in May. eHealth and workforce development are both critical issues for the association and its membership.

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Quotes:

"eHealth - and Telemedicine or TeleHealth services have to be considered as part of eHealth - is key to the necessary transformation of the healthcare systems in Europe" says the European Health Telematics Association (EHTEL), Member of Health First Europe. "By being integrated into the healthcare delivery process, these services can benefit patients, healthcare professionals and citizens; they can indeed improve quality of life and wellbeing and contribute to the sustainability of the healthcare systems. It is vital that barriers such as legal uncertainties, market fragmentation and lack of interoperability are removed – this is key to making Europe the global leader in eHealth."

"I have used e-procedures for follow up and monitoring by a specialist who knows my condition well in France for several years. This means I do not need to take up consulting time and it helps me to self-manage my condition". Judy Birch, HFE Advisory Committee Member and UK patient

*Established in 2004, Health First Europe is a not-for-profit, non-commercial alliance of patients, healthcare workers, academics, healthcare experts and the medical technology industry. Its primary aim is to ensure that healthcare is regarded as a vital investment in the future of Europe and that every European citizen should benefit from the best medical treatments available.*

*As part of a series of awareness-raising activities, Health First Europe organises events and issues [publications](#) with the aim of communicating the following core messages to EU decision-makers and opinion leaders:*

- *There are weaknesses in European healthcare systems; a re-think is required in order to meet current and future health challenges;*
- *Patients and clinicians should have equitable access to modern, innovative and reliable medical technology;*
- *The development of new and flexible modes of healthcare delivery will benefit both patients and healthcare providers;*
- *"Health equals wealth". Health is a productive economic factor in terms of employment, innovation and economic growth.*

*For more information, please visit: [www.healthfirsteurope.org](http://www.healthfirsteurope.org)*