

External Meeting Report

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Short Summary

Where does Europe stand with digital health solutions? How to effectively implement Digital Health technologies in our health systems? What is the role of healthcare professionals in the digitalisation of healthcare? From 6th to 8th February, multiple stakeholders discussed these critical questions at the Symposium on the Future of Digital Health Systems in the European Region organized by the World Health Organization European Region together with the Norwegian Center for E-health Research. The event was concluded with a **take home message: digital health systems have to be created by involving all actors and leaving no one behind while using the drive of the youth for breakthrough innovations in the world of digital health.** Lina Mosch (European Health Policy Director) and Justinas Balčiūnas (Permanent Officer in Brussels) represented European Medical Students' Association (EMSA) and highlighted the need for the sustainable implementation of digital health into medical curricula.

Background of Meeting

After contacting WHO-Europe Office, EMSA has been invited to participate in the Symposium. In September 2018 EMSA was accredited as a non-state actor of WHO Europe, thus this is the second

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WHO meeting that EMSA is present at. EMSA was represented by Justinas Balciunas, Permanent Officer in Brussels and Lina Mosch, European Health Policy Director. The aim of the Symposium was to develop priorities for public health action to support the adoption of digital health in WHO Member States, and to contribute to the development of a European vision and roadmap for the digitalization of national health systems. It was the first digital health symposium organized by WHO-Europe but WHO shows interest in organizing it on a regular basis.

Time and Venue

6 - 8 February 2019, UN City Copenhagen, Denmark

Participants at Meeting

Around 200 participants (representatives from the WHO Regional Office for Europe, member states, academia and non-governmental organizations.)

Content of Meeting

Please find the agenda of the event [here](#). Here follow summaries of important sessions of the meeting:

The Northern European Success story in Digital Health :

In this session Denmark and Finland Health Ministry representatives shared their experience with implementation of digital health:

- Shared medication records (SMR) between hospitals, municipalities, GPs, pharmacies. No matter where the patient is, the data is available.
- Areas where eHealth solutions are most beneficial thus far: chronic diseases and ageing.
- Biggest hurdle of digital health systems in these countries is the suboptimal interoperability and the need for patients to fill the same data over and over again.

EMSA intervention by PO:

Introduction of digital technologies into healthcare is undoubtedly very important and we saw three good examples. But to make sure the technologies are used to their fullest potential, we need to guarantee health workforce has the necessary knowledge and skills. How do you approach this in your countries?

Finland: started the [“MEDigi” initiative](#) (only in Finnish) with the aim to equip medical and dental students with digital health skills. Moreover, Finland has been adding subjects into to the curricula doctors for advanced training

Estonia: digital health skills are acquired during continuous professional education. Would like to see more focus on cyber security.

Cultivating digitally capable Health workforce

The question discussed in this session was: “How can the health workforce be effectively prepared to work in a digitalized healthcare system?”

The session began with four input talks:

Kristine SORENSEN (founder of [global health literacy academy](#))

Health literacy & digital health literacy - setting the scene:

- Health literacy is a neglected public health issue
- Digital health literacy is a key prerequisite for the successful implementation of digital health technologies
- We have to change the system in order to meet the demands of people regarding digital health solutions (people are already applying digital health - how does the healthcare sector react to this?)
- Does a policy of “digital first” imply “analog second”?
- Successful digital health solutions include a problem-oriented design that takes care of cultural diversity, patients' and citizens' needs while leaving no one behind (difference between equality and equity!)
→ health literacy by design! Involvement of all parties as equal partners through increase simplicity and usability

Lars MÜNTER - Danish Committee for Health Education

- There is a need for flexibility and general capabilities of the healthcare workforce in terms of digital health. Challenges are inequalities, lack of prevention, interoperability, and the dichotomy between an approach focussing on specialists for digital health and a holistic approach that aims to equip every healthcare professional with basics of managing digital health.
- Is the role of healthcare professionals the defender of the realm or the explorer of the frontier? Are they gatekeepers or coaches, an extra straw or a helping hand?
- Future requirements include interdisciplinarity, constantly retooling the approach / dealing because technology constantly changes as well as lighthouses that show beneficial effects.
- Timing: the future is now. Most of the tools are here already, we just need to apply them
- Training of the health workforce is key.

ANNE MOEN - Professor, Director UiO:eColab, Institute for health and society, University of Oslo, Norway

- Competence in healthcare includes clinical health informatics and digital health literacy!
- Expand learning strategies! E.g. simulation, visualization, analytics, teamwork (also virtual teams, include the patients in the team) and communication.
- Evidence-based medicine becomes an increasingly important part of medical education with the rise of Big Data analyses.
- “Medicine-based evidence” (tuned to decision-making for the particular patient.)

Claudia PAGLIARI

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(Author of a systematic review about Human Resource information systems in JAMIA)

- The importance of leadership in digital health implementation
- Human Resource information systems could help us understand better the needs of health workforce and cost estimations for health systems
- For a successful implementation a well thought out communication is crucial.
- NHS England will sponsor an academy for potential leaders in Digital Health with 7 million pounds

EMSA intervention by EHPD: EMSA did a survey among medical students where we found that there is a huge lack of education on digital health. We need to close the gap in medical education regarding digital health. As we have seen during your presentations, we have the tools and strategies for how and what to implement. Also, our survey results indicate that medical students are willing to learn and apply digital health technologies. So it is time to finally take action. What do you see as the biggest barrier to the sustainable implementation of digital health into health professions' curricula in Europe?

The medical curriculum is packed and it is not easy to advocate for more digital health education. Deans are hesitant to implement those formats on digital health education. We need a holistic approach to implement digital topics in all subjects. Regulations and bureaucracy are expensive and hindering the drive. University of Edinburgh has a Master [on global eHealth](#)

Aren't we establishing education on digital health too late?

Yes, but that is not a reason to stop the efforts. The biggest change will be an interdisciplinary environment. A Digital Health specialty could be introduced.

Can students push for more implementation of digital health? → Create a toolkit: “How to advocate for digital health education / educate fellow medical students on digital health. (The European Health Policy Pillar is currently working on this in collaboration with Medical Education Pillar)

EMSA survey results have been presented to the dean at the Oslo University. Still big competition.

How can young (future) healthcare professionals get involved in decision making processes?

- push for involvement on the European level (follow-up of e-Health Stakeholder Group)
- Interact with authorities
- By being active in the civil society and NGOs

Closing Plenary - Take Home Messages

The take home messages of the Symposium were summed up by

1. Digital health systems have to be inclusive, leaving no one behind!

Digital Health solutions should not lead to an increase in inequalities or digital divide of societies. Conversely, we need to ride on the crest of innovation to collectively advance in universal health coverage.

2. There is a need to invest in digital health systems

Health systems' management is not rocket science, it is much more difficult.

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Digital health system foundations should be built with an intersectoral approach aiming for sustainability.

3. Co-creation and Youth:

- partnership between state actors, patients and communities;
- youth are driving digital health and we cannot fail them.

The risk of not investing in digital health is too big and too expensive. At the same time, digital health solutions should be weighted and analysed learning from failures.

Follow-Up:

Questions from the External Meeting Online Input Form:

- *What strategy to use to incorporate digital health topics into curriculum? Do you feel it is necessary?*

The involvement of users as early as possible in the development and planning of digital health implementation is key to its success. There is no coherent strategy on how to implement digital health into the education of health workforce. This has to be changed.

- *I am not sure if this will be a part of the discussions but I wanna leave it here so you might consider it when it's discussed. In the end of last year, WHO Europe has been involved in some other meetings regarding Digital health solutions for child immunization in Europe. I wonder if there's any follow up, or upcoming plans on that. If you see or hear something, would be nice to know them so we can follow up on that matter to see if we can join that action somehow.*

Sorry I cannot give more details on this as I also do not know that much. But I guess you got the main idea :)

This point was unfortunately not being thematized at the meeting.

- *What are the possible disadvantages of digital technologies for health care workers?*

Digital health technologies might not necessarily diminish the workload for the health workforce, however, it is the patients that should and will benefit the most and the workforce will have to adapt accordingly to the developments.

Additionally, the usability of technologies is not optimal yet, causing problems (non-acceptance of healthcare professionals) in the implementation process.

- *What are the goals of e-Health implementation for UHC nearly achievements in Europe by 2020?*

[WHO resolution on digital health](#): The utilization of digital technologies is a “means of promoting equitable, affordable and universal access to health for all, including the special needs of groups that are vulnerable in the context of digital health”. The resolution gives recommendations and urges member states to take action to support the implementation of digital health into their health systems in order to contribute to the goal of universal health coverage (UHC).

- *Not a concrete question, but if possible someone could elaborate on the ambitions for interoperability of the different eHealth systems (e.g. eFile, administration systems in hospitals)*

Information about [Interoperability and Standardisation of eHealth Services](#) and overview about the EU's activities in this field.

[European Commission Recommendation on a European Electronic Health Record exchange format](#)

- *Secondly: how collection of sensible health data will be regulated in this new upcoming markets?*

GDPR - General Data Protection Regulation

European Data Protection Supervisor - [information on GDPR and health data paper](#) by the European Patients' Forum

Meetings:

[Young Leaders for Health](#) - agreed to keep each other updated and seek for collaboration.

Coordinator of the eHealth Action by the European Commission and President of the Board of SPMS the Shared Services and eHealth/IT authority of the Ministry of Health.

- In communication via email regarding EMSA activities on eHealth and possible EMSA involvement.

European Junior Doctors

- Following previous online meeting about EMSA-EJD joint work on digital health, outlined a more concrete timeline for actions.

Finances

Participation was free. EMSA covered travel expenses for Lina Mosch (117,30 €).

External meeting representation checklist

External meetings: Representation Checklist			
(please copy this checklist once filled to your external meeting report to the relevant section)			
Name of the representative:	Justinas Balciunas, Lina Mosch		
Name of the external meeting:	WHO Symposium on the Future of Digital Health Systems in the European Region		
Date of the meeting:	6-8 February 2019		
Location of the meeting:	UN City, Copenhagen, Denmark		
Checklist	Done/Not Done	Explanation if Not Done	Comment
Preparation for the meeting: relevant policy papers read, consulted with Director/other EEB member if needed	Done		
Preparation for the meeting: previous external meeting reports read (at least for the previous 2 years)	Done		
Preparation for the meeting: Input asked from members and EEB members	Done		

At the meeting: PR measures taken (use of EMSA social media channels)	Done		
After the meeting: Policy follow up sheet is updated	Done		
After the meeting: External partners sheet is updated	Done		

Conclusions

EMSA's participation in the Digital Health Symposium was valuable for several reasons. Firstly, Digital Health will be one of the most important topics in the upcoming years. This is perfectly reflected in the most recent [announcement](#) of WHO restructuring, which includes the creation of a Digital Health Strategy Department. Secondly, it was the perfect occasion to learn about the most important players in the field of digital health and get their contacts. Furthermore, we promoted EMSA's work on the topic and participated in the discussions, thus establishing our association as an important stakeholder. The Digital Health Symposium is likely to be held in the future too and we should aim to be part of the panel discussions or one of the sessions as it would increase the visibility even more. However, this is only possible through closer communication with the WHO. From our perspective, digital health could be one of the collaboration points between the two organisations.

If you have any questions regarding the event please do not hesitate to contact us!

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