

eHealth could provide a new model for patient-doctor relations

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Opinion

Digital health is a game changer for patient-centred healthcare, writes Michał Boni.



Michał Boni | *Photo credit: Bea Uhart*

Digital health is evolving very rapidly. In order to further develop eHealth, several crucial conditions must be met. There are also many new opportunities and benefits for patients, along with considerable challenges.

eHealth means more personalised medical services across the EU, with the safe transfer of health data. It will enable us to measure patients' health in real time, so that they can manage their own health more actively.

With eHealth, diagnoses could be improved thanks to the use and re-use of different types of health data and devices as well as with artificial intelligence.

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There will also be more therapies adapted to the individual needs of patients, thanks to the analytical possibilities of patient data and of combining different sources of information on individual cases.

These will include genomes, long-term monitoring, scenarios of potential disease threats and prevention strategies using properly-designed algorithms. eHealth could also provide a new model for patient-doctor relations, where both parties can share responsibility.

Healthcare systems could become more prevention-focused rather than simply reactive. This could help make systems more cost-effective, particularly important given our ageing societies.

The Commission's recent communication on the digital transformation of healthcare should be used as a reference for accelerating reforms and initiatives at European level, intended to support national healthcare systems. Most importantly, it will enable the establishment of a new, patient-centred healthcare model.

The communication suggests reviewing many existing regulations and directives to assess the adequacy of these solutions and of the potential need to change, complement, or reorient them to build a new digital model for European healthcare.

The key anchor of the Commission proposal concerns the eHealth digital service infrastructure. It will open up opportunities for sending, sharing and governing healthcare data across the EU.

As citizens, we need access to our health data no matter where in the EU we are. This will improve medical services and allow physicians to examine our health records when assessing our health. This will also facilitate the exchange of ePrescriptions and patient summaries.

The communication also highlights the need to use 'real world data', which rarely collected in clinical trials. The best way to better prevent diseases is to collect more data, such as the European reference networks are currently doing.

Everything will depend on the willingness of key stakeholders to cooperate. National authorities in particular should cooperate with one another, using EU funding for some pilot projects.

It will be easier to make significant progress as long as we achieve common objectives on technical and technological specifications and requirements. Here, EU leadership and coordination is necessary. This could be done through the Connecting Europe Facility, Horizon 2020 or the new Digital Europe

programme post-2020.

Two kinds of leadership are important here. First - symbolically - is leadership from empowered patients. The key message from the Commission communication is: "Person-centred approaches to organising health and care can allow citizens to assume responsibility for their health".

The second is European. If we want to avoid failure, we need to decide who will take on the role of leader in all of the processes I have mentioned.

Only strong leadership can make the proposed solutions more ambitious, but also closer to the digital game changer, which is necessary for better healthcare in Europe.

About the author

Michał Boni (EPP, PL) is a member of Parliament's civil liberties, justice and home affairs committee

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