e-services focusing on e-health

e-Health, the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) for health, is one of the most rapidly growing areas in health today.

Global Observatory for e-Health

- Established in early 2005, the GOe is a significant new WHO initiative; it reflects the Organization's recognition of the emerging importance of the use of ICT for health systems and services.
- The Observatory's mission is to improve health by providing Member States with strategic information and guidance on effective practices, policies and standards in e-Health.

Objectives of Geo

- provide timely and high-quality evidence and information to help national governments and international bodies improve policy, practice and management of e-Health services;
- raise awareness and commitment of governments and the private sector to invest in, and advance, e-Health;
- collect, analyze and distil e-Health-related knowledge, which will significantly contribute to the improvement of health using ICT; and
- disseminate research findings through publication of the GOe Annual Report on key E-Health research topics as a reference for governments and policy-makers as well as theme-based reports on special topics.

E-Health tools

- Electronic Health Records:

Also called Electronic Medical Records (eMR), Electronic Health Records (eHR) of a patient's clinical history are used to support clinical actions by health professionals. They include information such as test results, medication and general clinical history.

- Patient Information Systems:

Patient Information Systems (PIS) contain information about a hospitalized patient and are used to support both the administrative and clinical activities in a hospital.

E-Health tools

- Hospital Information Systems:

Computer-based information systems that support information processing within a hospital in areas such as administration, appointments, billing, planning, budgeting and personnel.

- General Practitioner Information Systems:

ICT-based systems that support the work of a general practitioner (GP)/primary health care practitioner are called General Practitioner Information Systems (GPIS).

E-Health tools

- National electronic registries:

Electronic databases of related records on specific medical subjects. They contain data on births, mortality, cancer, diabetes or other subjects of medical or epidemiological interest. Registries can be accessed by authorized users through the use of ICT.

- National drug registries:

Electronic databases containing national pharmaceutical information. The content varies depending on the purpose of the registry. Examples include databases of risks of exposure to drugs during pregnancy and potential drug interactions.

Benefits

- Improving transparency and accountability of care processes and facilitating shared care across boundaries;
- Aiding evidence-based practice and error reduction;
- Improving diagnostic accuracy and treatment appropriateness;
- Improving access to effective healthcare by reducing barriers created, for example, by physical location or disability;
- Facilitating patient empowerment for self-care and health decision making;
- Improving cost-efficiency by streamlining processes, reducing waiting times and waste.

Issues

- The legal and ethical implications of using health information technologies and clinical decision support systems which may result in harmful effects in certain cases are not yet clear. (In awareness of this, the USA government in its 10 year Health Information Technology Plan is aiming to clarify the regulatory framework for electronic records and incentive their use.)System developers need to employ quality and safety assurance methods to avoid clinical risks and legal liability.
- The effects of e-Health tools on patient behaviour and the patient-clinician relationship are unclear.