

eHealth

priorities and strategies
in European countries



Fact sheet

Northern Ireland

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Towards the Establishment
of a European eHealth
Research Area

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United Kingdom

Health services in the United Kingdom

Each of the four constituent countries of the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) has its own, separately administered health service. All are publicly funded and branded as the “National Health Service” (NHS) offering broadly the same range of services – it is essentially the administrative arrangements that are different. The four health services operate independently, but there is close cooperation and collaboration to ensure that all citizens receive the same quality of care.

The NHS in England is the responsibility of the Department of Health. NHS Connecting for Health is an integral agency of the Department of Health that is responsible for delivering the National Programme for IT for the NHS in England. The Department of Health is also part of the UK Government and is responsible for representing the UK internationally in health matters, liaising with the other “home countries” as appropriate.

The NHS in Wales is the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly Government. The Welsh Assembly is a devolved administration that draws its authority from the UK Parliament and has responsibility for a number of issues, including among others health. “Informing Healthcare Wales” is the National Programme for NHS Wales to develop new methods, tools and information technologies to transform health services for the people of Wales.

The NHS in Scotland is the responsibility of the Scottish Executive. Scotland has its own Parliament and Executive again formally drawing its powers from the UK Parliament, and with devolved responsibility for health and other matters. Scotland has its own eHealth strategy administered by the Scottish Executive Health Department.



The NHS in Northern Ireland is a little different from the other UK health services in that it has a combined health and social care administration. The Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive are currently suspended, but Northern Ireland retains its own distinct administration under the Northern Ireland Office of the UK Government. Health and social care in Northern Ireland comes under the Northern Ireland Government Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety with its own eHealth strategy.

Northern Ireland

Strategic perspective

In Northern Ireland the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) is responsible for overall Health and Social Services policy. Health and Personal Social Services in Northern Ireland are provided as an integrated service. Northern Ireland is currently reforming its public body structures under what is known as the Reform of Public Administration which will result in a single Health and Social Services Authority.

Specifically, the way forward in eHealth and Social Services was determined, agreed and declared in the DHSSPS Health and Personal Social Services Information and Communications Technology Strategy, published in March 2005. The Strategy has two major, interlocking themes for ICT development: Electronic Care Records and Electronic Care Communications. The emphasis of the strategy is on these two themes, but the importance of ICT as a means to access other information and the need to sustain and modernise ICT in other areas is also recognised.

Implementation perspective

Some work is well underway regionally to select specific systems that will support clinical services across Northern Ireland including Picture Archive and Communication System (PACS), theatre services, pharmacy/prescribing and laboratory services. The local solutions do not interfere with the objective for regional solutions, best value and affordability through procurement processes. Other specific project activities include:

- All GP practices in Northern Ireland are now connected to the secure GP network, and most practices have access to a managed e-mail and internet service and to the new electronic pathology results service. During 2006/07, GP systems will be populated with the new Health + Care Number and will be connected to the Electronic Registration system. This will enable all new GP registrations and all changes to patient demographic



information to be transferred electronically between the Central Services Agency and GP practices. The introduction of this new personal identifier across the HPSS will speed up the referral process and will help reduce administration costs. It is also a necessary prerequisite for beginning to build service-wide electronic patient records.

- An Electronic Prescribing and Eligibility System (EPES) is being rolled out over the next two years. Paper prescriptions will be printed at the GP's surgery with a two-dimensional barcode that encodes all of the prescription information. At the Community Pharmacy the 2D barcode is scanned and all of the "prescribed" information (including doctor, surgery and patient details) is captured by the pharmacist on to their system. When the pharmacist confirms what they will and have dispensed, any changes are recorded as "dispensed" information. The full record of the transaction (prescribed information, details of the patient and their method of payment or claim for free prescriptions) is sent by the Community Pharmacist to the central EPES database and used to support their claim for payment of services rendered and check the validity of the patient's claim.



Electronic Care Record: The electronic care record will contain structured data, text and images generated from a variety of sources and accessible wherever and whenever there is a legitimate need to access it. Access will be managed under a strict “need-to-know” regime that complies with agreed rules and procedures for confidentiality and consent. To create an electronic care record, it is necessary for the data to be read in an electronic format, typically through the use of ICT at an operational level. At present, for example, there are elements of electronic care records that are held in ICT systems in various different locations: general practice systems; community systems, with more extensive coverage anticipated through introduction of new Person-centred Community Information Services; and hospital systems – such as patient administration, clinical specialties, pathology, radiology, accident and emergency, and others.

The scale of the Health and Personal Social Services (HPSS) and the use of common systems offer opportunities for an innovative approach to electronic care records. In effect, the combination of developing care records within all organisations, increasing use of HPSS-wide specialist systems, consolidation of ICT, a single Health and Care Number, and the use of common systems, creates a virtual electronic care record.

Electronic Care Communications: Health and social care processes are familiar to all healthcare professionals who are service users. Almost every contact with the HPSS involves communication between healthcare professionals, between functions, between HPSS organisations, or with other public and private sector bodies. Examples of such contact include: appointments; referrals between care professionals; requests for services and communication of the service outcome; discharge letters and other follow-up communications; and prescribing.

Current ICT systems manage some aspects of these processes, but in most cases only within individual organisations. As a result, communication of care information

in the HPSS today relies on paper. For there to be a shift from paper to electronic communication, more widespread access to ICT is required, and capabilities – that in some cases exist already – need to be made simpler to use and seamless for the user.

Current and future activities

Launched on 9 March 2005, the HPSS ICT Programme identifies, initiates and monitors initiatives and individual projects to achieve the vision set out in the ICT Strategy. In Northern Ireland, Health ICT projects are currently underway in relation to, among others:

- Health and Care Number (HCN)
- Electronic Prescribing and Eligibility System (EPES)
- Person-centred Community Information System (PCIS)
- ICT Training for all healthcare professionals
- Server Consolidation – towards the Electronic Care Record (ECR)
- Regional Laboratory ICT Modernisation
- Public Sector Broadband Aggregation
- Secure remote access
- Infrastructure Strategy
- HPSS Data Warehouse

Core resources

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (HPSS), Information and Communication Technology Strategy

<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/ict-strategy.pdf>

HPSS ICT Programme Summary

<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hpss-ict-programme-summary.pdf>

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety website

<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/hss/rpa-home.htm>

About eHealth ERA

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