

Chapter 43

GuiMarket: An E–Marketplace of Healthcare and Social Care Services for Individuals with Special Needs

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ABSTRACT

The healthcare sector has been continuously growing in importance in the past years throughout the entire world, and particularly in most Western countries and the U.S., where we witness an increase of expenditure in health per capita every year. This is related to many aspects of contemporary society, including an increase in life expectancy, the public demand for a better quality of life and better health services. This must be met with more cost-efficient approaches, and new technology-based solutions for providing health and other services. The chapter contextualizes the utilization of electronic marketplaces (e-marketplaces) for the social and healthcare sectors, how this field has been evolving in recent years, current challenges and trends, and their contribution to society. The authors also discuss a pilot project of an e-marketplace for healthcare and social services currently being developed in the Guimarães Municipality, including its goal, definition and implementation, as well as the commercially available enabling technology and tools.

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INTRODUCTION

The March 2000 Lisbon European Council set the objective of making the EU ‘the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion’ (European_Commission, 2002b). According to the strategy defined by the European Council in Lisbon, e-Health has a clear role in the European Union strategy – eEurope – and is the key to attain a stronger growth and create qualified employment in a dynamic and knowledge-based economy (European_Commission, 2002a, 2004, 2005). However, this intention requires specific actions, from research and development of new models for application and/or integration of existing technology, new technological advances, the widespread reach of broadband internet access to all population (particularly remote areas) and overcoming the digital divide due to ability to use technology, specific public health actions, and the problematic issues of integrating the population with special care needs, such as elder people, in the e-Health systems.

If continuous health care systems and care to people with special needs are performed in an unarticulated and fragmented manner, provided by entities that do not communicate among themselves, the results will be wholly undesirable. Often, those two specific areas of health care and social services must be provided at the patient’s home. On the other hand, the existence of a network of health care, social care and professional services providers, working articulately with an underlying effective management and intermediation service, based on an e-Marketplace for health care and social care services, can be a powerful tool and result in effective and efficient service to people with special needs (elderly and permanently or temporarily disabled people)

A wide range of supporting technologies already exist that can contribute to such purpose. What is needed is an integrating environment to

identify user needs transmitted over an e-marketplace platform and the allocation of services providers to answer these needs, integration and management, performance monitoring and evaluation, commitment control, etc.

The authors are developing a pilot project for the Municipality of Guimarães¹ envisaging the definition and implementation of an e-marketplace for healthcare and social services, integrating healthcare professionals and professionals of social services with people with special needs (or their relatives) and institutions willing to accede to these services.

The service is focused on the needs usually fulfilled by day care hospitals and continuous care units, home care, and support to the elderly and people with special needs. The effectiveness and efficiency on providing health care and the population well-being, particularly the previously mentioned segments of the population, are based on correctly orienting resources that can comply with their problems and specific needs, as well as their expectations of quality and comfort.

More precisely, the objectives of the proposed project consist of offering new solutions in the area of health care and social care, provision of home services, making available privileged communication means between:

- The individual and the entities with social concerns, or entities that provide social and healthcare services or independent service providers
- Institutions that provide social /health-care services and independent service providers
- Two institutions providing social / health-care services, for complementarily solve a given situation

Secondly, this project will give more flexibility and quality of live to individuals that for any reason (incapacity temporary or permanent, age, etc) should stay at home can find in the eMarketplace

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