

Chapter 9

The Social Role of Technology in Healthcare Quality Improvement

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to describe the social role of technology in healthcare quality improvement. Methodologically, the study was based on a review of the relevant literature, Greek and foreign, as well as Internet sources related to the social role of technology in healthcare quality improvement. The main conclusions drawn were the following: a) The development of new technologies in the field of health and their involvement within the social context is today a fast accelerating process; b) The presentday expansion of health-oriented technology is of vital importance because of current trends in the field of healthcare and of the social evolution on healthcare services; c) Information technology is capable of profoundly contributing to the improvement of the quality of health, and thus to the wellbeing of the citizens in a society; d) By the use of health technology, more efficient and productive financial management is achieved with numerous benefits for the economy; e) Electronic health can improve the quality of healthcare thereby facilitating the work of health professionals; f) Greek society is being increasingly influenced by both international and domestic scientific and technological advances in health technology despite the existence of significant legal barriers; g) Current trends in the European Union as far as health technology is concerned are intimately connected with expanding citizen participation in the electronic revolution and their increasing access to the Information Society.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61350-120-7.ch009

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of the Informatics and Communication Technologies, their integration into almost every aspect of everyday life and their widespread diffusion into all sectors of social activity, including the fields of health/healthcare, is today a fast accelerating process. This is observable, to cite but one example, in the intense interest and high levels of involvement manifested by social scientists regarding matters such as science and technology and their relationship with society and all social matters (Agrafiotis, D, 2003). In this context, it is the state's obligation, in the interest of the prudent advancement of the information society, to ensure that this newly developing society will include everyone and will provide all citizens with a high quality of life.

At the continental level, 'electronic' Europe is aiming for accessibility for all European citizens to the benefits of the Information Society with regard to health and healthcare, and this is directly associated with the electronic health initiative for achievement of provision of optimal healthcare quality. Almost all member-states of the European Union have experienced exponential growth in the introduction and increasing implementation of health technologies in recent years, including new medicines and diagnostic tools, telemedicine and surgical equipment. Such innovation provides enormous opportunity for governments, providers and patients to supply and obtain enhanced healthcare services and outcomes.

Today, governments are finding themselves increasingly required to manage scarce resources as strategically as possible, and this may be accomplished by investing in those services that deliver the best health outcomes. This translates as care that is affordable, effective, safe and patient-centred and, in the new century, a range of rapidly proliferating health technologies are offering them the solution. These novel technologies now present governments with unprecedented opportunities to provide high quality and innovative care to meet

their population's health needs more effectively while also reining in their exploding healthcare budgets and safeguarding the basic principles of equality, access and choice among all members of society. Moreover, innovation is amply supported via sufficient market access to new treatments (Sorenson, C, Drummond, M, Kanavos, P, 2008).

One of the proposed actions in the framework of electronic Europe is the necessity of using an electronic health card which replaces all papers required until now when healthcare was provided in another member-state, the networks of health information between points of healthcare (hospitals, labs, domiciles) using broadband connectability for this purpose. There also exist pan-European information networks and health services disseminated through the Internet such as information for healthy living and disease prevention, electronic health records, tele-visits, electronic refunds. The accessibility to health information for all citizens using qualitative criteria is also very important (Giberiti, A, 2010, Hristodoulakis, T, 2001).

The present study is based on a review of Greek and foreign literature and of Internet sources and aims to investigate the social role of technology in the improvement of quality of healthcare.

THE SOCIAL NECESSITY OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE IMPROVEMENT OF HEALTHCARE QUALITY

The introduction of the technologies of Informatics and Communication into the sphere of health for the achievement of ever more efficient and high-level healthcare services to be provided to every citizen anywhere and anytime is of the utmost importance in our presentday world. This is on account of the current trends in the field of health and healthcare as well as of the social evolution involving the increased demand of healthcare services such as the following: a) the ongoing transformation of the current nosologic model due

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