

# Telemedicine: Commission adopts plans to help doctors and patients access healthcare from a distance

**(04/11/2008) Today, the European Commission adopted a Communication to support and improve access to telemedicine for EU citizens and healthcare professionals across Europe. In response to a call for action from Member States, this initiative aims to increase and broaden telemedicine services, including diagnosis, treatment and monitoring at a distance across Europe. Such services will allow, for example, a patient suffering from a rare retinal disease to be diagnosed in his hometown by a specialist working at a European Centre of Excellence for eye diseases located thousands of kilometres away. Patients with chronic heart failure will be able to have their disease more closely monitored and to enjoy better quality of life while staying at home. The European Commission proposes 10 actions to address the related challenges in the years to come.**

"Telemedicine can radically improve chronically ill patients' quality of life and give people access to top medical expertise. It is our duty to make sure patients and health professionals can benefit from it," said Viviane Reding, EU Commissioner for Information Society and Media. "At the same time, the provision of remote healthcare services through ICT can optimise the use of scarce human and financial resources in the medical field."

EU Health Commissioner, Androulla Vassilou expressed her belief that "Telemedicine tools can indeed deliver improvements both in quality of care and patient safety as well as increase access to healthcare. This means both better services for citizens, and more innovative and efficient health services." "The key to success", Commissioner Vassilou added, is "the full involvement of citizens, patients and health professionals".

In an ageing Europe, where more and more citizens live with chronic health diseases, telemedicine is an important tool. Despite the potential benefits that telemedicine can provide, its' use is still limited in most parts of the EU.

For instance, telemedicine allows the monitoring of important health parameters (such as blood sugar levels or blood pressure) to be carried out from the patient's home, avoiding troublesome and - particularly for the sick or elderly - exhausting trips to a doctor or hospital. It can improve access to specialised treatment in remote areas where access to healthcare is difficult. It can also contribute to shortening waiting lists, for example in radiology, when reading and interpretation of medical images, such as radiographs (X-rays) or Computed Tomography (CT) scans, can be performed at a distance.

Furthermore, telemedicine, which is already a multi-billion global industry, can contribute substantially to the growth of the European economy. European industry, especially SMEs, can tap the financial and clinical benefits from this expanding market, provided that barriers to development such as market fragmentation and legal aspects are addressed.

## **The actions proposed by the Commission are:**

1. To increase confidence and acceptance of telemedicine services among users. In particular, by encouraging provision and dissemination of scientific evidence of its effectiveness and cost effectiveness.
2. To bring legal clarity on existing EU legislation regarding telemedicine services and encourage Member States to improve provision of telemedicine services.
3. To solve technical problems such as the lack of adequate community-wide broadband infrastructure and interoperability of telemedicine devices.

Bron:  
Source:

