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Implementing an electronic medication overview in Belgium

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Background: An accurate medication overview is essential to reduce medication errors. Therefore, it is essential to keep the medication overview up-to-date and to exchange healthcare information between healthcare professionals and patients. Digitally shared information yields possibilities to improve communication. However, implementing a digitally shared medication overview is challenging. This article describes the development process of a secured, electronic platform designed for exchanging medication information as executed in a pilot study in Belgium, called “Vitalink”.

Findings: The goal of “Vitalink” is to improve the exchange of medication information between professionals working in healthcare and patients in order to achieve a more efficient cooperation and better quality of care. Healthcare professionals of primary and secondary health care and patients of four Belgian regions participated in the project. In each region project groups coordinated implementation and reported back to the steering committee supervising the pilot study. The electronic medication overview was developed based on consensus in the project groups. The steering committee agreed to establish secured and authorized access through the use of electronic identity documents (eID) and a secured, eHealth-platform conform prior governmental regulations regarding privacy and security of healthcare information.

Discussion: A successful implementation of an electronic medication overview strongly depends on the accessibility and usability of the tool for healthcare professionals. Coordinating teams of the project groups concluded, based on their own observations and on problems reported to them, that secured and quick access to medical data needed to be pursued. According to their observations, the identification process using the eHealth platform, crucial to ensure secured data, was very time consuming. Secondly, software packages should be adapted to daily activities of healthcare professionals. Moreover, software should be easy to install and run properly. The project would have benefited from a cost analysis executed by the national bodies prior to implementation.