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Outcomes from a workshop on e-Health: smarter planet, smarter healthcare

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Background: The term e-Health is relatively recent and broad. It encompasses implementation of information and communication technologies in the healthcare sector for clinical, research, educational, service delivery, and administrative purposes.

Aims & Methods: During the 2015 WONCA Europe (Istanbul) Conference, 72 Family Doctors participated in an e-Health workshop titled “Smarter Planet Smarter Healthcare, e-Health”. The aims were, 1) to outline e-Health resources and solutions that doctors have used, 2) to understand the advantages and disadvantages in e-Health, and 3) to build an e-Health experience-sharing platform. A series of presentations outlined resources available to help develop innovative e-Health applications; examples of the practical implementation of e-Health were also showcased through case studies. Participants subsequently self-divided into four groups, and in ‘round table’ sessions, four themes were discussed, namely Mobile Health, Medical Education, Social Media and Rural TeleMedicine. SWOT analysis formed the basis for discussion, and participants were invited to present personal insights into their own solutions from a multi-perspective viewpoint.

Results: Participants reflected on the impact of e-Health on their personal practice and the lives of their patients. A broad range of ideas were captured which illustrated potential e-Health solutions; the feasibility of these solutions was discussed in the context of available resources and current constraints. Participants were also provided with a powerful networking opportunity that facilitated knowledge sharing and the development of new interactions and partnerships.

Conclusion: Advantages of e-Health include the potential to reduce costs and improve quality of care, effectively track chronic patients, keeping doctors and patients updated, improve access to Primary Healthcare through online consultations, and drive innovative development in technology. Potential disadvantages and constraints of e-Health are lack of technological skills, an inability to empathise, overload of information and work, and possible issues around security. Additionally, there remains a lack of concrete evidence of its benefit.