



Digitisation boost for Swiss health care system

The Swiss health care system produces 300 million sheets of analogue information and 1.5 million GB of digital data annually. This comparatively modest digital data volume is likely to increase dramatically in the future, concludes a survey by the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW).

Most of the Swiss health care system is still on the brink of digital transformation. Electronic payment transactions and online shopping aside, the average Swiss citizen will have hardly noticed any benefits of digitisation in hospitals, surgeries and care homes yet. This state of affairs must change in the upcoming years – not least because of the untapped potential for fighting rising health costs.

Maximum digitisation level for hospitals

The ZHAW survey concludes that around 1.5 million GB of digital health data in the form of images (x-rays, photos etc.) and text files are generated annually in Switzerland. As Florian Liberatore, who headed the ZHAW survey, says: “73% of this data is accounted for by 240 hospitals, another 11% by approx. 12,000 medical specialists across the country. They are the two most common users of data-intensive imaging processes. The current, still comparatively modest digital data volume of 1.5 million GB, is the equivalent of just 0.5% of the annual data traffic generated by smartphones in the Swisscom network.

GPs generate the most paper

The analogue data generated every year in the Swiss health care system fills around 300 million sheets of A4 paper or the equivalent of 500,000 lever-arch files. Registered doctors (GPs and specialists) account for 43% of this, with care homes accounting for another 17%, where documentation still tends to be paper-based.

Data volumes rising faster than in other sectors

In the health care system, data volumes are expected to rise substantially faster overall than in all other application areas Survey. Florian Liberatore says: “The main drivers are new technologies in the imaging and analysis fields and an increasing focus on capturing sensory and other exogenous data.” Experts also expect that the introduction of electronic patient records (EPD) will contribute to the increase in the overall volume. Electronic data records will facilitate access to digital health data, resulting in it being duplicated more often and stored locally.

Digital spells easier access and more efficiency

Digitisation and electronic data records let patients and health care professionals access health information easily and securely. According to the 2017 Swiss eHealth Barometer, 76% of the population view electronic data records positively or at least with an open mind. In the future, the average Swiss citizen will enjoy greater transparency, but also greater responsibility for their data. As a whole, the health care system will gain in efficiency and quality. “The digitisation trend is a major opportunity to optimise processes and eliminate duplication,” claims a confident Florian Liberatore from the ZHAW.



Expert survey “Swiss health data now and in the future”

At the behest of Swisscom Health, the Winterthur Institute of Health Economics at the ZHAW conducted numerous expert interviews and site inspections. In the process, data volume, traffic and use per case or organisation were collected for all relevant players in the Swiss health care system. At the same time, statistical data on case figures, user behaviour and the health care system in general was processed. Finally, the insights gained were validated by experts.

Other documents

The summary and info charts of the survey are available at www.swisscom.ch/healthdownloads (in German and French).

Berne, 21 June 2017