"It is time to take the bigger leap"

Dutch Minister of Health Edith Schippers speech at SNOMED CT Implementation Showcase, Amsterdam 2014

Welcome to the Netherlands, welcome to the beautiful city of Amsterdam. 'Making Health records make sense'. The subject of today can seem a little technical, maybe even a bit confusing.

But it comes down to something very simple: creating one language for the exchange of medical data. And that is highly important. Because in healthcare, communication in one language can make the difference between staying alive or dying.

That's why it is important to develop one language by which doctors and patients are able to communicate medical records. And for patients to gain access to their own medical data.

Widely adopting that common language is a crucial part of the innovation we need.

Over twenty-five nationalities have gathered here today to work on taking that next step. I believe that making use of innovation and e-health, could be the solution to one of the biggest challenges of our time: How to make sure that our health care stays available and affordable to everyone. And how to keep a high standard of quality at the same time.

Like many other countries, the Netherlands is confronted with an aging population, growing technological advances with regard to treatment options, and an increase in chronic patients.

All of these notions are a challenge to the sustainability of our health care system. Patient's empowerment leads to shared decision making. A higher retirement age and from that: more people working with a chronic disease. All this shows that society is changing. And we need our healthcare to join these changes.

That is why we are replacing specialist medical care with primary care. And at the same time replacing primary care with self-management. This is a very important transition that follows people's wishes to live as independently as possible. For as long as possible.

Smarter use of technological innovations and new medical devices, is part of the answer in meeting these wishes. And it follows the trend of growing possibilities already present in our daily lives. Think of online shopping. And you probably booked your trip to this congress online, in the comfort of your own home. Maybe surrounded even by your family. Think of online banking, and so on. In these fields we have seen drastic and impressive changes resulting in higher quality, increased user-friendliness and lower costs for consumers.

I believe we can achieve incredible effects in health care if we start making full use of the technological possibilities we have already available.

The challenge in Dutch health care, as in many other countries, is to start using the available tools on a large scale, AND to work together. We know about the smart plasters monitoring COPD patients. It won't be long before clothing with sensors monitoring our health, will replace them. There are many good initiatives. But these are mostly subsidized pilots limited to a single hospital or region. Everyone seems to be doing their own thing solitarily. And these valuable initiatives disappear when the money dries up. At the same time something is missing: a solid standard in exchanging digital information. Between doctors. Between patients and doctors.

Between doctors and pharmacists. Between doctors and insurers. As insurers play a key role in financing in the Dutch healthcare system.

It is time to take the bigger leap.

That is why in the Netherlands we have set 3 goals:

One, Within five years we want eighty percent of the Dutch chronically ill to have direct access to their medical data. Think of test results, vital functions, medical information. Information that can be used with mobile apps or internet applications.

Secondly, Within five years, seventy-five percent of people with diabetes and COPD will be able to monitor their own health and sent data digitally to doctors or nurse practitioners. No more unnecessary doctor's appointments, no more unnecessary tests.

And last but not least, within five years everyone that receives care at home will have telehealth available twenty-four-seven.

A precondition to reach these goals is to adopt one standard of terminology. This will facilitate care professionals -and their patients in their documentation and communication. We need one language. We need to start using it now. And we need to protect people's privacy at the same time.

So how are you going to do that? How are you going to speed up? And how are you going to get everyone involved in implementing it? These are important questions to be answered.

My call to you today is: Make it happen and keep it simple! If you don't do it soon, Google - or Apple - might pass you by. And we end up with more medical dialects than we already have.

Thank you very much and I wish you a successful congress!