

## Editor's Page

## Personalised Health Care: An Emerging Aim

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**P**ersonalised health care, a relatively new concept, has as its central aim the out-of-hospital follow up of chronic disease sufferers with the aid of electronic technology. The whole project includes long-term data monitoring, transmission of relevant information by wireless or network connection, electronic archiving, analysis of medical data, along with other, continuously developing capabilities.

The technology of personalised health care is based principally on the patients' use of portable or implantable systems that monitor a variety of physiological parameters, such as twenty-four-hour heart and respiratory rate, cardiac arrhythmias, as well as right ventricular pressures. Evidently, in the near future this exponentially advancing technology will permit the monitoring of additional parameters, such as oxygen saturation or glucose levels. The aim of these devices, known collectively as Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for Health, is to improve citizens' access to health services, to improve the quality of those services, and of course, to boost the efficiency of the health care system overall.

The wider social and scientific implications of ICT for Health (eHealth) drew the attention and support of the European Union at an early stage. The European Commission has been supporting research activities in this field for the last two decades. It is estimated that by the year 2010 financial investment in eHealth will reach 5% of the total budget of the European Union's member states; by 2013 more than one billion euros will be available for research in this field.

The active involvement of most EU member countries in the field of ICT for Health must, of course, take account of certain social, financial, and demographic realities. In this regard, it is acknowledged that the progressive ageing of European populations (by 2050 it is estimated that the population aged over 65 years will have doubled) and the ever increasing cost of health services require drastic changes. For the elderly, a central objective is that they should enjoy "active ageing" (regular activity at advanced ages) and independent living. For chronic disease sufferers, a number of services will be offered outside the traditional care areas – hospitals – specifically in their homes.

All this requires innovation in the form of integrated monitoring systems that are capable of enhancing many of the services to be provided. It is fortunate that the European Commission has understood early the importance of ICT for Health and is systematically investing in its further development. For all of us who work in the health services it is essential to realise the needs and the new, rapidly progressing realities.

Obviously, personalised health care is just getting started internationally, and in Europe in particular. It is a story reminiscent of the early days of motor cars. In the initial phase of development there were many difficulties, and even inspired creativity sometimes led into blind allies. Afterwards, everything came together in response to people's needs.

It seems inevitable that the development of ICT for Health must tread the same path. We are on the brink of a new era.