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Technical briefing on digitalization of health systems

Monday, 16 September 2019

13:00–14:30, Lounge area 7

Background

1. The effective implementation of digital technologies in health care is widely recognized as being crucial for establishing efficient, well-functioning health systems, empowering patients as part of a transition to integrated, person-centred care, and ensuring that the vital health information which underpins the future of decision-making on population-wide and clinical care is made available when and where it is most needed.

2. Digital health – a broad umbrella term encompassing e-health as well as developing areas such as the use of advanced computer sciences (in the fields of “big data”, genomics and artificial intelligence, for example) – also plays a significant role in achieving the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda incorporates and extends Health 2020 by strengthening the capacities of Member States to achieve better, more equitable and sustainable health and well-being for all throughout the life course.

3. In practical terms, digital health contributes to the attainment of target 3.8 of the Sustainable Development Goals (to achieve universal health coverage) in Member States through its role in:

- extending the scope, transparency and accessibility of health services and health information;
- widening the population base capable of accessing the available health services (including through its role in reaching marginalized and underserved populations);
- improving the delivery of essential public health operations, including public health surveillance;
- facilitating training of the health workforce; and
- offering innovations and creating quality and efficiency gains in the operation of health systems and the provision of health services.

4. WHO Member States further acknowledged the potential of digital technologies to strengthen national health systems by adopting resolution WHA71.7 in May 2018, which frames the role of digital health within the agenda for health systems strengthening and “as a

means of promoting equitable, affordable and universal access to health for all". This resolution also gives WHO the mandate to deliver a global strategy on digital health, which is currently in draft form having undergone two rounds of consultation.

5. As a step towards developing regional guidance on digital health, the Division of Health Systems and Public Health, together with the Norwegian Centre for E-health Research, hosted the WHO Symposium on the Future of Digital Health Systems in the European Region on 6–8 February 2019, which brought together an audience of over 350 participants to discuss 21 core topics relevant to the digitalization of health systems.

6. The symposium identified three key high-level messages in relation to the safe and effective implementation of digital health and the design of future health systems in the European Region.

- (a) Digitalization is challenging our understanding of how and where health care can be delivered and is driving a transition to predictive and preventive models of care.
- (b) Digitalization of health systems is not simply “continuing what we’re doing now, faster and more efficiently” but is:
 - looking at reinventing how health services are delivered and the changing role of health care professionals and (empowered) patients;
 - addressing how the rights and consent of the individual can be respected and acted upon; and
 - harnessing the value of data for health.
- (c) Digital health is central to achieving universal health coverage through more efficient and effective modes of providing quality health care with equitable access for all. However, innovating towards a future enabled by digital health requires linking investments in digital health with the achievement of public health objectives.

7. The outcomes and discussions from the symposium and additional Member State consultations will contribute to finalization of a European roadmap for the digitalization of health systems, which will guide Member States on the actions to take for the reform and development of health systems and health services.

Objectives of the briefing

8. Against this background, the technical briefing will:
- provide an overview of the key components of the European roadmap for the digitalization of health systems and solicit further input for its finalization;
 - seek guidance from Member States on future priority areas for action by the WHO Regional Office for Europe and its partners for the strengthening of national health systems through digitalization;

- explore opportunities for building public health capacity in Member States to support the safe and effective implementation of digital innovations in health and for mitigating the emergence of a digital divide in European health systems that prevents equitable access to the benefits of digital health and undermines efforts to ensure that no one is left behind in the delivery of individual and population-based health services.

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