

Brief interview with PD Dr. Urs-Vito Albrecht

Three questions to PD Dr. Urs-Vito Albrecht, Deputy Head of the Institute for Medical Informatics, Hanover Medical School, Germany.

“eHealth gets to the core of the German healthcare system”

In terms of digitisation, the German healthcare system is lagging behind – what are the reasons?

It would be wrong to blame one of the parties involved here. A good example is the much-criticised electronic health card (eGK) in Germany, which – due to many delays, organisational uncertainties, insufficiently implemented technologies or infrastructure, and many further factors – was introduced with a fraction of the originally planned features. Required specifications and technologies such as test cards and card terminals or the hardware for data transfer between practice computers and internet were delayed. All this resulted in physicians but also patients having reservations about the digital health card.

What digital solutions does the health market require?

As is known, our society is ageing; patients hence become increasingly ill. This is a great challenge for our health care – as is the increase in widespread diseases: in 2016, 36.7 million patients – this is almost half of the German population – visited a physician because of musculoskeletal or connective tissue problems. 35.1 million Germans suffered from respiratory diseases, 29.5 million from glandular, nutritional and metabolic diseases. An online survey among diabetics revealed that more than 60 % already use a health app, 92 % of them a diabetes app. The idea behind is to improve the self-management of the disease. Both physicians and patients appreciate solutions that meet these needs. This may include low-threshold offers such as apps, but also telemedical approaches. Especially in rural or structurally weak regions, where medical care is somewhat difficult already today due to the lack of doctors, mHealth and eHealth-based solutions can be of help – even if they cannot replace medical care.

80 % of health apps directly address the consumers. How can clinics benefit from digitisation?

It provides clinics with various opportunities: the mobile access to diagnostic data right from the patient bed, for example to medical image data or laboratory values, can also be used to show patients procedures and diagnoses, thus improving communication between the parties involved. Basically, apps can be used before, during and after the hospital stay to organise administrative processes, as they do not stop at the boundary between sectors. This also includes the establishment of a digital patient file. It can help clinics make health care more efficient, facilitate documentation and optimise processes.

However, existing technical and infrastructure issues need to be solved until eHealth solutions will be properly implemented and be ready for widespread use. Another challenge will be the



acceptance of all parties involved. In Germany, data protection is viewed much more suspiciously – by patients and providers – than in countries where corresponding concepts have already been implemented. The financial aspects remain a challenge as well. Providers expect an adequate remuneration of their services rendered digitally and patients expect a reimbursement beyond pilot projects. If it is possible to design solutions that take account of these points, positive effects are expected already due to the simplification of organisational factors, from communication to data collection and repository.

