

Seminar: Redesigning health

Connected Health Cluster, Tallinn Tehnopol

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Opening remarks by Tanel Ross, EHIF

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

I am very happy to welcome all of you in Tallinn on the occasion of such an important event. My name is Tanel Ross, I am Chairman of the Management Board of Estonian Health Insurance Fund that is the sole provider of mandatory universal health insurance for Estonian population. However, I am here today not only in my capacity of the CEO of the by far largest purchaser of health care, but I am rather representing Estonian public sector in general. So I am greatly honored to say a few words to outline our general approach to supporting and underpinning policies that, we are sure, will also contribute to innovative thoughts and innovative practices in Estonian health care system.

Our seminar brings together some of the brightest and most experienced innovators in our Nordic-Baltic region from one side and actors with proven track record of being able to influence Estonian health care sector from the other side. And as is often the case under such circumstances, the overarching topic of the seminar – redesigning health – is of course nothing short of being extremely ambitious. Redesigning health, not redesigning health care not health care delivery models is of course a title that puts the right aim, the right goal of innovation transparently and bluntly in front of us, for everyone to see.

And I personally can only agree with this title – indeed, the end goal of innovation in any realm of human activity is not a new practice, a new device, a new medicine, but rather improved wellbeing or, as the case is in respect of today's seminar, better health of every individual and, if need be, of every patient. I indeed look very much forward that you will leave today with new thoughts and new ideas of not only what to do in tactical terms, but rather how to harness the forces of innovation to address the real ultimate strategic goal – that is, how to indeed ensure better health. Again, also in this context I am very happy that we have such a distinguished lineup of eminent speakers to share with us both theoretical and practical underpinnings to this end.

Let me now briefly to provide a few remarks on some key issues and developments in Estonian health care that, I believe, will provide ample room for embracing innovative practices in our health system both in short, but even more importantly, over medium and long term.

First, I would like to start with a notion that perhaps after a somewhat slow start some years ago, Estonian health care politics is today increasingly concerned with the quality of health care and, ultimately, with the quality of life. For years, we have been excessively obsessed with the amounts that have been provided in all care settings. Naturally, health care system as such has had its fair share in improving the health outcomes in Estonia over the last ten years or so. However, I am pretty confident in saying that there is today almost universal acceptance

that we need a much stronger focus on quality of care, on proven outcomes of treatments and, ultimately, on how to support health so as to avoid increased relative demand for health care services in the first place.

From the so-called macro prospective, the importance of quality of health system is enshrined on national overarching strategy documents, such as Estonia 2020 and in national public health strategy. On the level of every-day activities, the focus on quality has resulted, for instance, in increased attention to prevention, but also in tedious and hard work to put in place system of key quality indicators nationally and to develop patient pathways or, if need be, national treatment protocols. From the prospective of health insurance, I can also say very clearly that over the next years, the quality issues will start to figure increasingly prominently in our contractual relations with service providers.

Second, important changes are being prepared to incentivize the alignment of the structure of health care service providers better with the needs of modern Estonia and advancements in medical practices in general. The role of primary care service providers continues to gain in importance and prominence to reflect the simple fact that family physicians as highly qualified specialists are increasingly better equipped to cope with most health care needs of patients and by working together with patients, including those with chronic conditions. Moreover, it goes without saying that primary care is the setting that should be and will be responsible in implementing most of the expanding set of preventive services for Estonian population. Against this backdrop, Estonian authorities and the medical profession are in a process of broadening the spectrum of services delivered in the primary setting and of upgrading operational model of primary health care to ensure further formation of group practices and primary care centers.

Simultaneously with primary care reform, there is an ongoing process of further streamlining of specialist care by supporting the integration of hospital networks that will be anchored on the centers of excellence. Networks will continue to be branching out to the rest of Estonia where specialist service delivery will be ensured by joint efforts of a county hospital and center of the network. Further integration of hospital networks will undoubtedly increase the importance of and provide more opportunities for holistic, integrated treatment. Moreover, consolidated system of primary health care centers from one side and hospital networks from the other side open up new avenues for combined delivery and purchasing models for, e.g. higher risk patient with multiple chronic conditions.

Finally, in addition to sustained changes in the underlying universal health care model that will, in time, bring about a truly new paradigm as the system will refocus itself to prevention, quality and integrated, increasingly personalized care, the government has also recently initiated two ambitious and bold initiatives with particular relevance for innovation.

Estonia has some repute of being in the forefront of e-health. To ensure that the hard-won momentum will not be lost, the new e-health strategy has been recently put in place. The emphasis of the strategy is on ensuring the development and maintenance of sound public e-health central infrastructure, data warehouses and universally enforced data standardization from one side and to support the culture of innovation, including the use of innovative methods, devices and modern IT solutions by service providers and by every person from the other side, including by developing system of certification of new solutions for usage in

health service delivery. The e-health strategy will also to further technical and legal framework of big data analysis for both scientific and service delivery purposes.

The other important initiative is concerned with jump-starting the analysis and possible piloting of the elements of precision medicine to deliver truly personalized prevention and, if need be, care for Estonian people – even if proven public health methodology will likely prove its resilience and efficiency for some years to come. In this context, we in Estonian Health Insurance Fund stand ready to include in the service package of public universal insurance innovative services in every level, both on primary and specialist care. We look forward to working with medical profession, service providers and producers to that end.

Dear friends, with these words I conclude my introductory remarks to provide some broader context that is, hopefully, conducive to innovation in Estonian health system. I wish you a very successful day and every success in redesigning the health.

Thank you very much.