Your Health Your Say

Submission by Australian Association of Practice Management

The Australian Association of Practice Management (AAPM) thanks the Australian Digital Health Agency for the opportunity to comment on digital health in Australia. The Australian Association of Practice Management Ltd (AAPM) is a non-profit association, nationally recognised as the peak professional body dedicated to supporting effective, efficient and profitable practice management in healthcare. We represent healthcare Practice Managers in general practice, specialist, allied health and dental practices as well as managers in day surgeries and healthcare clinics within hospitals.

The potential of digital technology in healthcare

AAPM strongly agrees that digital technology has the potential to transform and improve healthcare outcomes for Australia. Improved communication between health and medical professionals will lead to greater coordination of care, less duplication of tests, and increased ease of access to appropriate care for those not in urban areas. Increased use of digital technology in monitoring health indicators has the potential to free up the general practitioners' time to focus on the more complex conditioners while allowing other health professionals to maximise their scope of practice. This will lead to greater efficiencies in health care

Barriers to health professionals being able to connect, communicate and coordinate with the right people

The main barriers to the effective communication between health professionals are:

- Lack of interoperability of secure messaging
- The poor and unreliable internet accessibility through much of rural and regional Australia and especially remote areas.
- Few health and medical professionals apart from General Practitioners are using eHealth technology.

A key advantage of My Health Record and digital health is its transportability, particularly for people on holidays, the grey nomads, itinerant workers and people in rural areas with limited access to specialists and allied health professionals. However, the low speed of internet, in these areas and lack of reliable access is a major barrier to quality health care. From the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015 data, over 33% of Australia's population live outside the Greater Capital Cities areas. People living in rural and remote areas have shorter lives and higher rates of disease and injury. (*Australia's Health 2014*). Death rates increase with increased remoteness with very remote having 1.5 times the rate of major cities. The main causes of this increased death rate are: CHD, circulatory diseases, motor vehicle accidents and COPD. People living in rural areas also have a higher incidence rate for cancer. (*National Strategic Framework for Rural and Remote Health (2016)*)

Much of this gap in health equality can be attributed to the lack of access to healthcare. Digital health has the potential to reduce this inequality. Interoperability and reliable high speed internet access would facilitate this.

To date, the focus for education and facilitation of the use of eHealth technology has been in General Practice. Until digital technology is widely used by medical specialists and allied health professionals, its usefulness in healthcare will remain limited.

What do health professionals need to be able to effectively connect, communicate and coordinate with the right people?

One of the key factors in enabling health professionals to effectively connect, communicate and coordinate with the right people will be establishing interoperability of secure messaging. This will

facilitate the efficient communication between health and medical professionals including referrals to specialists and allied health professionals, letters from specialists to GPs about treatment and transmission of test results reducing unnecessary replication of tests.

Facilitation of allied health professionals and specialists in the use of digital technology in healthcare will increase its use among General Practitioners. It is the coordination of care between a multidisciplinary team which will improve patient-centred care resulting in improved health outcomes, better access to the different health professionals that are required to manage chronic conditions, and ultimately better health outcomes.

AAPM represents Practice Managers in all health sectors including General Practice, Specialists, Allied Health and Dental. AAPM is ideally placed to assist the Australian Digital Health Agency broaden the use of digital technology into other health sectors.

AAPM's priorities in respect to digital health or eHealth

AAPM's priority in respect to digital health is to increase the awareness and understanding of those involved in practice management in the following areas:

- how to establish effective systems for the implementation and use of digital health technology.

- how to ensure use of digital health is compliant with privacy legislation

- development of policies for the appropriate use of digital health

- the opportunities to improve patient well-being through the effective use of digital health strategies

Practice Managers are often the key facilitators of the implementation and use of digital health in private healthcare practices. They understand the operational issues facilitating and creating barriers to the effective use of digital technology. They are often the key staff person showing the health professionals how to use digital technology and freeing them to concentrate on patient care.

AAPM is able to assist the Australian Digital Health Agency in accessing this expertise to facilitate the effective use of digital technology in private healthcare practices in all health sectors.

How could data and technology be better used to improve health and wellbeing?

The My Health Record needs to be a more effective platform for managing Chronic Disease Care Plans. This would greatly enhance the multi-disciplinary healthcare team to share the Care Plan, to coordinate the care provided by each health and medical professional and to communicate changes with each other.

What should be the immediate priority initiative for the My Health Record to ensure it delivers real value for clinicians and the public?

For the My Health Record system to work effectively, uploading of Shared Health Summaries and Event Summaries needs to be part of the health professional's regular work flow. If only one in a hundred patients have a My Health Record, this will not happen. Health and medical professionals will not look for a MHR if they are successful only 1% of the time. The biggest issue for General Practitioners is the registering of patients for My Health Record. This is a time-consuming chore for them. If most patients are already registered, then uploading information is very easy.
AAPM recommends that the Opt-Out model needs to be implemented national as quickly as possible. It is only when a critical mass of patients are using a My Health Record, that health and medical professionals will see the real benefits. Experience in Northern Territory shows that around 50% of patients need to be registered for this critical mass to be reached.

Gillian V Leach

Gillian Leach
Chief Executive Officer

Australian Association of Practice Management Ltd (AAPM)

Contact Details:

Level 1, 60 Lothian Street,
North Melbourne. VIC 3051

T: 1800 196 000 | **M**: 0417 823 006
F: 03 9329 2524

Email: gleach@aapm.org.au

Web: www.aapm.org.au