

First in a series of interviews with Chairs of IHE Europe countries: IHE Switzerland

'We are proud the IHE Connectathon 2012 will be in Switzerland'

IHE now has nine national organizations. Switzerland is one of the youngest participants. The IHE organization was founded in March 2010 with great enthusiasm. We talk to Christian Hay, Chair of IHE Switzerland. "We are proud the IHE Connectathon will be in Switzerland in 2012. To organize it, is our main goal for this year."

Christian Hay currently works for Medinorma LLC in Rolle, Switzerland, as leading Partner. However, he started as a lawyer and worked for the pharmaceutical branch since mid of 1980s in various positions. Since 1995 he was involved in GS1 standard implementation in the Swiss healthcare. Christian Hay is also board member of the Swiss Medical Informatics Association, participates actively to ISO TC 215 work and sits in the 'Joint Initiative Council'. In March 2010 he has been elected Chair of IHE Switzerland.



General wish

"IHE Switzerland was founded last March. But we were working and talking about IHE for a longer time. Actually, IHE is the 'tool' of the framework which has been selected by the coordination body confederation /cantons. We already started with eHealth and standardisation, let's say, in 2007. Experts did recommend IHE. It was a general wish to found IHE in Switzerland", Christian Hay tells. The organisation of the national IHE initiative in Switzerland is classical and to be compared with other IHE Europe countries. It is an association with a legal status. Members (approx. 60) of IHE Switzerland are vendors (50%), users (30%), private persons and small companies as well as public and governmental organisations such as ehealth suisse and healthcare departments (20%). The Board exists of nine persons. Hay: "Of the organisation point of view, IHE Switzerland

doesn't see a difference between one member and another. The membership fee is the same for everybody. As well as the voting system."

Federal strategy

According to Christian Hay, it is a big challenge to get more users involved with IHE. The same challenge as other European countries will face. "We have some hospitals that understand IHE and gave some demonstrations. But still it is a hard work to get the users on board. On the other hand, IHE in our country is still very 'young'. IHE is not yet sufficiently known. But don't forget, we are just one year old. Many organisations are now talking about IHE. This is part of the federal strategy of eHealth. It becomes unavoidable. But the 'driver' in Switzerland is not IHE itself. We are just one of the 'tools' for eHealth implementation. Because our national coordination office seeks coordination between the stakeholders, many of them are slowly discovering IHE. And we have a federal law about EHR in preparation. Sure, we have something to say and become more known."

Vendors

How about the vendors? What is their view of IHE? Christian Hay: "I don't know how it is in the Netherlands, but here it is still a big challenge too. Of course we also have the large international companies. But the vendors here are more fragmented. The smaller companies don't know, or not yet, know enough about IHE. It's the chicken and egg problem. If the users don't exactly understand the value of IHE and don't require IHE, of

course the companies don't know about IHE and doesn't do any effort on it. So it's very important, as I said before, to get the users on board." This is, as far as we can consider, a difference with e.g. The Netherlands. Many vendors are known with IHE and are also willing to implement IHE in their products. Or? Hay laughs and says: "It's typical in what we say in French, the glass is half empty and half full. It's how you look at it. Optimistic or pessimistic? The fragmentation we have in our country in the vendor side is quite considerable. And we also have bad habits. That's a big difference between Switzerland and the Netherlands. We are less organized than you are. As I look to your contribution to ISO e.g. and Health IT, it's just considerable. We have none. Or HL7 in the Netherlands, another example. You have big activities. We have nearly nothing." But IHE Switzerland is just founded one year ago. We can understand. Hay continues: "Yes, but I compare the other organisations. The involvement of the Dutch people in ISO TC215 is just considerable. I am a member of ISO TC215. I can measure the involvement from the Netherlands compared to Switzerland. It's not because you have more inhabitants. It's not proportional. We are now in the process, we wake up. Since six weeks we are again participating member in ISO TC215. We will have to face the meeting of this new committee at the end of this month after eight years. Eight years without any meeting! So coming back to your question, what is the involvement of the vendors? Problem is they don't know what happens internationally and, as a matter of fact, almost nothing about IHE."

e-Toile

Success stories... it's a bit early to talk about it, or not? Christian Hay: "Yes, we are beginners. The only success story I can mention is a project linked to epSOS. It had barely anything to do with IHE. It's a project – e-Toile - launched in Geneva about ten years ago. I am sure, at that time, nobody was thinking about IHE. But the goal was that the medical file of the patient should be not only for the care professional in front of you. Sharing information, that was the aim of the project. During the course of the development of this project, one has been facing problems which were possibly solved by using IHE. The consequence of e-Toile is now the Swiss contribution of epSOS. Yes I am proud of it, but you should not overestimate it as it is localised only in one canton. And yes, in the area of Sankt Gallen, we have another project – about which I know only a little – where they have implemented a regional Master Patient Index."

Connectathon 2012

As we ask Christian Hay what the plans are for the future, he directly answers: "Preparing the IHE Connectathon in Switzerland for next year. Besides IHE, all board members have their own job. An organization like this is a lot of work and is extremely challenging. And important to leverage this effort on the national market. That people will know that IHE exists. Giving local companies a chance to participate. We will educate people and bring them to this Connectathon, to see how IHE works. I am sure the Connectathon 2012 is going to absorb 70% of our energy. But of course we will also work on the knowledge of IHE among the users and vendors. That's the normal priority."

Areas of activities for IHE in Switzerland include:

- Organization of IHE European Connectathon in 2012 (21-25 of May, Bern);
- Technical Framework as basis to implement eHealth;
- Laboratory: specifications and descriptions for contents and profiles;
- Strategic descriptions and documentations as published in 'eHealth in der Praxis', a practical documentation and description about standards, requirements and possible solutions;
- Marketing and motivation: IHE as one helpful instrument developing eHealth in Switzerland;
- Laboratory contents and profiles to develop processes in that area;
- Roles and access-rights in cross-community domains.

Source: IHE Europe

IHE Switzerland

Chair: Christian Hay

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The next interview in this series will be with Jose Carmelo Abillos, Chair of IHE Spain.