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Integrated Australian eHealth system takes first steps towards reality

Australia has taken its first steps towards an integrated national eHealth system with the introduction today of the Healthcare Identifiers Bill 2010.

Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) Chair Dr Emil Djakic said the bill would enable the country to realise the advantages of eHealth records envisaged by the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission (NHHRC) last year.

"Identifiers for individuals and health care providers are the first step, linking information across disparate systems. It will mean easier access to patient information for a range of health providers, and mean information follows the patient," he said.

Dr Djakic, a national clinical adviser to the National E-Health Transition Authority (NeHTA) which is developing Australia's eHealth approach, said health identifiers would be released in July 2010.

"This is the first step in building a truly connected eHealth system in Australia. It will allow the system to be linked in ways which are not now possible and will be essential to enable successful system reform," he said.

AGPN has continued its push for recognition of eHealth and its role in our future health system in its Federal Budget submission. The Network already supports general practice in the adoption and use of eHealth systems and has been crucial in the 'computerisation' of general practice.

"AGPN recognises that in this brave new world of eHealth and health reform, general practice will need assistance to adopt and make effective use of the identifiers and future technology.

"Across jurisdictions and public and private health systems, the eHealth model must be standardised and the Network is the only organisation with the national reach to bring that change to general practice.

"While the identifier legislation is the first 'baby step' in national eHealth development the opportunities it presents are exciting," Dr Djakic said.

"The identifier opens the door to an enhanced health care system for patients. Once you can identify a patient across the system accurate matching of records, safe and efficient patient referrals and discharge, and effective medication management become possible. The Network will be key to helping general practice, which is already 98 percent computerised, take the next steps in using this technology to improve health care for their patients," he said.

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