



International Network for  
Health Workforce Education

## **Thematic Network on Interprofessional Education for Digital Skills**

### **Scope**

Effective interprofessional education (IPE) is an innovative strategy that enables effective collaborative practice in healthcare. IPE is a necessary step in preparing an organised health workforce and it has been proven that collaborative practice strengthens health systems and improves health outcomes (WHO, 2010). Europe faces increased demand for health services due to ageing populations, rising patient mobility, and a diminishing supply of health workers caused by recruitment and retention issues. Digital technologies, including eHealth advancements, often aim to tackle these issues by creating smarter healthcare processes, allowing services to be delivered closer to patients, and reducing the workload of healthcare professionals. However, healthcare professionals' digital skills are often underprepared for such innovation.

The role that IPE can play in improving the digital skills of health professionals has, until recently, been underappreciated and underexplored. IPE that is focused into a competency-based digital curriculum would serve to meet the drastic need for enhanced digital skills training for the health workforce. Such an educational development would, in effect, ensure future health professionals are be ready for both collaborative practice and the increasingly digitalised sector in which they work. Other potential benefits include improved healthcare systems, higher quality of care, more efficient and effective collaborative practice, and enhanced patient experience.

### **Outline & Objectives**

Currently, educators focus on training healthcare professionals to deliver quality patient care, but increasingly there are a number of digital solutions that disrupt health professionals daily work. Digitalisation does not only occur in hospitals but also in the home with many European countries developing more integrated health and social care. To improve this 'hospital at home' care setting, different skills are needed to maintain and improve on patient centred care. The development of new technologies to collect data on a patient and assist healthcare delivery is happening on an almost routine basis. However, the challenge is to ensure that healthcare professionals can utilise, interpret, and analyse results and properly interface with and support patients based on this digital equipment and technology.

The Thematic Network will develop a Joint Statement that lays the foundations for an EU wide IPE digital skills curriculum that can be implemented in all Member States. This Thematic Network is ideally timed to meet this challenge by working to build European wide, interprofessional and multi-sectorial buy-in for tools and resources designed to further digital education, competence and skills development in healthcare. The overall aim of the Thematic Network will be to ensure that educational programmes ultimately support healthcare staff as they begin their journey as collaborative practitioners in a fast-moving digital health system.

This action will aim to strengthen digital skills as part of a wider IPE programme and will thus create an equality of opportunity throughout the EU. This will allow greater mobility of staff and professionals with a consistent training in interprofessional skills, digital skills and team working. Understanding how the use of digital tools can aid and improve patient care, as well as increasing staff confidence to communicate with other members of the interdisciplinary healthcare team, will

increase efficiency, improve the integration of healthcare throughout Europe, and develop a digitally skilled workforce able to cope with the demands of an aging population with complex co-morbidities.

The Joint Statement will have a number of outcomes that directly impact on healthcare professionals, educators, researchers, policy makers and health systems. During 2020 the Thematic Network will conduct a full review and gap analysis of digital skills in Europe (building on work conducted by the European Health Parliament), assess the latest best practices for IPE across the globe and develop recommendations for an extensive competency-based interprofessional curriculum for improving digital skills in Europe's healthcare systems.

### **EU Health Policy Agenda Synergies**

The Thematic Network will address core aspects of both the 2014 [EU Agenda on Health Systems](#) and the [Digital Single Market Strategy](#). As outlined in both policy statements "health systems must be accessible, effective, and resilient to change and future challenges". The EU Agenda on Health Systems name a number of different pressures and our Joint Statement will assist in developing and improving the following areas:

- New technologies (plus their interoperability and standardisation)
- Patient empowerment
- Workforce shortages
- Uneven distribution of health professionals
- Health inequalities.

### **Lead & Partners**

The Thematic Network will be led by the International Network of Health Workforce Education, and we will actively work with any interested parties from Health Policy Platform. We have already canvassed our European membership and received endorsements from 47 colleagues in 19 Member States. We'll aim to engage several highly relevant organisational partners, our wider membership of over 1500 healthcare education actors and other key EU health policy stakeholders. INHWE will particularly call on the support of its Working Groups which have significant skills and expertise on the subject matter and can promote dissemination of the final Joint Statement, extending its reach beyond that of just the Policy Platform itself.



### **Further Information & Contact**

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