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**REALISING THE POTENTIAL OF INFORMATION
COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) TO SUPPORT
PEOPLE CHALLENGED BY ILLNESS OR DISABILITY TO
MAINTAIN THEIR INDEPENDENCE**

UDK: 364-787:364.65

This presentation charts the progress of ENS4Care, an innovative project funded by the EU for 2 years from December 2013 to engage social and health care practitioners in collaboratively addressing challenges arising from a rapidly ageing population in many parts of Europe (Eurostat, 2014). Principal amongst such challenges are the increasing numbers of people living with long-term conditions, disabilities, non-communicable diseases (NCD) and chronic diseases and the decreasing percentage of the population active in the healthcare labour force to manage the delivery of patient-centric care (WHO, 2010).

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) is one of 24 European partners in the project which is led by the European Federation of Nurses (EFN) and includes representatives from civil society, academia, social and health care professionals, researchers, regulators, trade unions and industry, working together to develop evidence based guidelines for the implementation of eHealth social and nursing care services.

In 1930 the eminent economist, John Maynard Keynes, predicted that, within a hundred years civilisation would have advanced so far that we would be able to meet all our material needs by working just 15 hours a week. In 1966 a US Senate Committee heard expert testimony that by 2000 Americans would be working only 14 hours a week. Last year a 2013 Oxford Martin School Study by Michael Osborne concluded that 47% of US workers could be replaced by computer driven technologies over the coming decades.

Regrettably however, for hard pressed social and health care workers quite the reverse has been the case. Better services and improved

working conditions for professionals delivering these in rich countries such as the UK should have flowed from increases in expenditure and technological developments. Instead bureaucracy and constraint have flourished and social workers rarely spend more than 30% of their time face to face with those needing their services.

In common with many other public service workers they are now expected to work harder and longer and their capacity to care for any dependent members of their own family challenged by illness or disability is severely diminished. Other speakers at this event have highlighted the catastrophic impact austerity measures adopted in response to the global financial crisis are having on those individuals and groups in society who were already most excluded and disadvantaged. It is easy to become disheartened and defeated in the face of such unfairness.

However, I firmly believe that where there is a will there is a way to make the radical changes that are so urgently required to secure the health and well-being of all citizens. For me good social work is simply about making sense of the impossible things that we all face at some time in our life.

Our job is about changing mind-sets and inspiring individuals and groups to explore all possible options to change their lives for the better. In these challenging times we must cross traditional boundaries between health and social work and find ways to achieve much more from the substantial resources at our disposal.

I therefore welcome this opportunity to present some information about the ENS4Care Project to participants in this important conference. The project aims to radically improve the support and services on offer to people who are challenged by illness and disability by harnessing the potential of the internet to put information about all the options open to them in their hands and those of the carers and professional health and social care staff supporting them.

Before doing so I will tell you a little bit about myself. I live in Scotland and my social work career now spans 43 years. I have practised as a social worker and managed services for all client groups and was Chief Executive of the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) for more than 10 years. I now work voluntarily in my village community where I have been promoting the principle of “reciprocity” and have contributed to the establishment of a Time Bank and befriending project.

I represent the European Region of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) on the European Social Platform, the European

Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) and the ENS4Care project.

Strategic partnerships are the key to our success as social workers and I cannot overemphasize the importance of belonging to professional networks and campaigning bodies. The European Social Platform is the largest civil society alliance fighting for social justice and participatory democracy in Europe. Established in 1995 the Platform unites 48 Pan European networks of NGOs and effectively campaigns to ensure that EU policies are developed in partnership with the people they affect, respecting fundamental rights, promoting solidarity and improving lives and that health and social services and protection are accessible to all citizens.

IFSW is a worldwide organisation that was established in 1950 and unites over 500,000 social workers from more than 80 countries who share a collective commitment to professional practice. The European Region of the Federation has independent NGO status and has 40 member organisations from 35 countries representing 165,600 social workers. It is governed by the small Executive group of volunteers listed on this slide and you will note that Georgia, Turkey and Armenia are represented. IFSW's objectives are to promote social work as a profession through international co-operation concerning professional values, standards, ethics, human rights, and training and to secure the participation of social workers in social planning and the formulation of social policies, nationally and internationally.

I will now focus specifically on the ENS4Care project, a thematic network established to share good social work and nursing practices and through evaluation and consensus building to create a set of guidelines on healthy lifestyle and prevention, early intervention, clinical practice, integrated care and skills development for advanced roles such as nurse and social prescribing. At least one of the ENS4Care network member organisations is represented in each of the EU Member States and most of those other countries actively seeking membership of the Union.

Many of the Pan-European organisations involved in the project, such as the EFN and IFSW-Europe, the European Union of General Practitioners, the European Nursing Students Association, Euro Carers, the European Institute of Women's Health, and the European Public Health Alliance cover all EU Member States and partners such as the Association of Patients with Cancer and Friends, have close networks with civil society.

Despite widespread recognition that “innovative, high quality, safe and cost-effective national health and social care systems are dependent upon policy-makers and stakeholders developing and implementing high-quality eHealth services (Sheikh et al., 2011) guidance in this field remains rare. The main objective of the ENS4Care project is therefore the development of evidence based guidelines for nursing and social care on the implementation of eHealth services in nursing and social care, building on existing good practices amongst members of the network and sharing and transferring knowledge across the European Economic Area (EEA).

At a time when most EU Member States are struggling to respond to a growing demand for quality, safe, equitable and accessible services for all citizens, they are also being challenged to be more innovative with regards to the sustainability of their health and social care and protection systems and theneed to invest in staff skills and capability to support people in need (Social Investment Package, 2013). Identification of the specific skills required and the development of mechanisms to routinely exchange good, innovative cost-effective solutions are urgently required.

These objectives were enshrined in the Digital Agenda (part of the “EU2020 Strategy”)to secure the deployment of ICT based solutions in health systems and the eHealth Action Plan 2012-2020 – Innovative healthcare for the 21st century and are aligned with “The EU Agenda for New Skills and Jobs” and the specific actions set out in the Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) of the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) on Active and Healthy Ageing. The guidelines that ENS4Care is preparing for the implementation of eHealth services address these objectives and those contained in the European Commission’s Action Plan on Integrated Care.

It is also worthy of note that the European Commission’s Employment Package acknowledges the health and social care sector’s role in providing new and attractive jobs in years to come. The evidence and consensus based guidelines that will be delivered by the ENS4Care project will cover innovative interventions and evaluation and will be applicable at national, regional and local level. They will contribute to improvements in the quality of care and financial sustainability of health and social care systems and identify key components necessary for macro-organisational changes, including new roles that social workers and nurses need to undertake and skills that need to be acquired, along within dicators to ensure that new services are empowering and cost effective.

The ENS4Care project will harness the potential of eHealth systems to make effective guidelines available in accessible formats to both health and social care staff and those using their services and foster continuity and quality of care as well as patient safety across EU Member States and the EEA. In this way informed choices can be made both about treatment regimes and models of care and support provided informally by relatives and friends in a voluntary capacity can be integrated with that delivered by the health and social care workforce. The deployment of eHealth services throughout Europe will facilitate the person-centred partnership between those requiring and those delivering health and social care services that is required to more effectively address health inequalities.

The eHealth guidance that is being developed by the project will put up to date information at the fingertips of service users, carers and those professionals supporting them about the merits of different treatment options, models of care and specialised equipment that will enhance their well-being, keep them safe and enable them to retain or regain control over the services they are receiving and live as independently as possible. The initial phase of the project has been concerned with identifying and building on existing good practices amongst the participants of the Network and sharing and transferring knowledge across European regions.

Draft guidance produced by the project at this early stage focuses on healthy lifestyles and prevention, early intervention and integrated care. NCD's, in particular heart and lung disease, account for 86% of preventable deaths and 77% of the disease burden in Europe (NCB Mortality and Morbidity Rates – WHO 2012). This highlights the need for the development of advanced roles such as social and nurse prescribing along with those concerned with the protection of children and vulnerable adults and the replacement of institutional service models with those that promote self-directed care and interdependence and prevent illness and disability occurring in the first place.

Nurse Prescribing has already been successfully introduced in Ireland and Spain and has the potential to be developed in other countries. The IFSW are keen to promote the concept of Social Prescribing where an alternative remedy involving a change in lifestyle may be offered rather than medication or other clinical intervention. Examples of Social Prescriptions include assistance to join an exercise or other club or a smoking or alcohol cessation support group. Such forms of assistance can be of particular benefit to people whose problems stem from social

isolation or other circumstances affecting their mental health.

The development of Information Communication Technology (ICT) based solutions, such as Tele Health and Telecare, are a central objective of the project. Tele Health can empower people living at home to assess their own state of health and where they wish this can enable health and social care professionals to remotely monitor their physiological data for diagnosis or disease management. Telecare uses a combination of sensors and other equipment, usually in the home environment, to help vulnerable and physically less able people to keep themselves safe and alert a control centre if help is required. All such services should of course compliment rather than replace existing services and personal contact and be human rights compliant.

ENS4Care will establish appropriate methodologies for the development and uptake of the guidelines produced and is determined to ensure that they are effectively published and disseminated to inform end users and public policy design. In order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the project, the European Nursing Research Foundation (ENRF) and a European Social Work Observatory (ESWO) that is being established will foster dialogue between researchers, practitioners and policy-makers/politicians about how to secure universal health and social care systems staffed by skilled, motivated and qualified nursing and social care staff employing eHealth services that respond flexible and creatively to changing needs and the requirement for continuity of care.

The ultimate goal of ENS4Care is the establishment of a sustainable mechanism to support nursing and social care research in the field of ICT enabled integrated care, uniting health and social care practitioners in a common endeavour to promote health and well-being. The guidelines that will be delivered by the project will cover both innovative interventions and evaluation and will be applicable at national, regional and local level. They will contribute to improvements in the quality of care and financial sustainability of health and social care care systems and identify the key components, necessary macro-organisational changes, roles and new skills that are required along with a set of indicators that can be used to determine whether services are empowering and cost effective.

I have distributed hard copies of a flyer about this important initiative to those present. Further information about other partners and the methodology underpinning the project can be accessed on the project website. www.ens4care.eu

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