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ZHAW School of Management and Law

Highlighting the Potential of Digitization in the Swiss Healthcare System

The new Digital Health Report issued by ZHAW clearly shows that for digitization in the healthcare system to advance more rapidly, its benefits and opportunities for all stakeholders must become better known. This also means recognizing and addressing related fears of society.

The electronic patient dossier (EPD) has been available in Switzerland since 2020, but according to the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH), only 0.2 percent of the Swiss population use this service. "There are many fears surrounding the topic of digitalization in healthcare. This includes the fear of surveillance or data misuse," according to ZHAW health economist Alfred Angerer. These concerns must be taken seriously, but the public must also be aware of the immense benefits of digitization in healthcare. In the recently published Digital Health Report 2023/2024, ZHAW researchers propose solutions in collaboration with Accenture, CSS, and Swiss Post.

Showing the benefits of digitized healthcare to patients

According to the Digital Health Report, numerous factors can have a positive effect on the acceptance of digitization in healthcare. These include a high level of user-friendliness but also the personal attitude and skills of individual users, including how familiar they are with digital applications and their affinity for technology. "A step towards digitization would mean enormous savings for patients in terms of quality and time. For example, health data would be available much faster. As a result, healthcare professionals would have the details of previous treatments and medications prescribed, and dangerous contraindications would be detected as a matter of course," Angerer explained. The ZHAW researcher added that this gain in the quality and efficiency of healthcare will mean fewer patient costs – a key concern in the light of constantly rising health insurance premiums.

Time savings and focusing on the core business

Various interviews with healthcare experts also confirm the benefits for healthcare professionals. For example, digital health solutions can help to diffuse many of today's stressful work situations. Well-designed solutions reduce the administrative burden, for example. They make communication within and outside organizations more manageable and more transparent, improving collaboration. The time thus



gained helps healthcare professionals focus on what is essential, namely taking care of patients. However, as Angerer pointed out, "In order for this transformation to succeed, solution providers must have a very clear understanding of the needs of their employees and pay even greater attention to the seamless integration of digital solutions into everyday clinical practice."

Technical solutions already exist

Despite the clear benefits of a digital healthcare system, Switzerland still lags far behind in international comparison, according to ZHAW researcher Sina Berger. "The most remarkable thing is that all the necessary technical components are already in place. In fact, numerous companies have introduced technical applications to solve their problems." The reasons why these solutions have not yet found their way into society are, she says, existing fears, on the one hand, and a lack of information, on the other. "With the current edition of the Digital Health Report, we want to encourage people to be more daring about digitization. To achieve the maximum added value, we must accept this change," Berger concluded.

A long-term perspective

The associated expense offsets the enormous added value of digital transformation. According to Alfred Angerer, hospitals, medical practices, and citizens must invest time and financial resources to transition from the analog to the digital world. "We are aware of the effort that this requires, but it is essential to consider the long term. If we look beyond the one-time investment, digitization will save us all a lot of time, reduce human suffering through better quality, and help us fight rising costs."

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Contact

- Alfred Angerer, Winterthur Institute of Health Economics, ZHAW School of Management and Law, phone: + 41 58 934 66 72, email: alfred.angerer@zhaw.ch
- Valerie Hosp, Communications, ZHAW School of Management and Law, phone: +41 58 934 40 68, email valerie.hosp@zhaw.ch