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Speech to e-Health Conference Session "eHealth in Support of Reforming Health Systems" by EU Commissioner for Research and Innovation Máire Geoghegan-Quinn

Dublin Convention Centre

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Dr McLoughlin,

Ladies and gentlemen,

You don't need me to tell you about the importance of the health challenge in Europe. You are certainly the experts on this.

However, what I would like to do this morning is contribute to the discussion by describing how research and innovation policies are currently supporting the rapid developments in eHealth.

In fact, considering how eHealth can deliver innovative healthcare and well-being ties in beautifully with our major actions on research and innovation at European level.

Innovation in healthcare is crucially important for Europe. Key goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy – growth, jobs, competitiveness, quality of life - depend on it. We now live longer in Europe - thanks to decades of investment, the excellence of our researchers, the innovative mind-sets of our companies and health systems, and the efficiency of our healthcare systems and services. This is a wonderful achievement, but it presents its own challenges.

The ageing of Europe's population means that the burden of cancer as well as chronic and degenerative diseases is getting heavier. Projections also indicate that if we do not change how we deliver health services, the demand for healthcare workers will be impossible to meet.

At the same time, Europe's biomedical industry is reducing its investment in research – the reasons include long product development cycles, high risk of failure and a lengthy regulatory approval process. We are producing fewer new drugs and at a greater cost. We must find ways to achieve the hat-trick of keeping us, our healthcare systems and our healthcare industry and economy in good condition. All of us here today are making a contribution to reaching that goal and the European Union is no exception.

Today, 844 collaborative health research projects are being funded by the EU Framework Programmes for Research. They represent an investment of 4 billion euro, involving some 3000 organisations from over 120 countries.

Impressive though they are, these are just numbers. Behind the figures lies a vast sharing of expertise, ideas, resources and infrastructures. That's what collaborative research is all about.

Besides funding these projects, the European Commission also plays a role in six international health research consortia, teaming up with countries from across the world to tackle changes that are too big for any one country or region to solve alone, such as chronic non-communicable diseases, traumatic brain injury and rare diseases.

In this context, let me highlight the Human Brain Project that aims to create the world's largest experimental facility for developing the most detailed model of the brain, so we can study how the human brain works and ultimately develop personalised treatments for neurological and related diseases.

We have also pioneered partnerships that have taken the whole concept of private-public collaboration to a new level. Our 1 billion euro investment in the Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI) has helped galvanize Europe's large pharmaceutical companies around important health issues. This collaborative platform offers a real

win-win for everybody, including regulators, patient organisations, SMEs and academic researchers.

But we can always improve and that is of course our aim with Horizon 2020, the EU's new programme for research and innovation that will begin next year.

The close correlation between research, innovation, economic growth and employment is the main reason that the European Commission has proposed to increase the EU's investment in research and innovation through Horizon 2020. The programme will couple research to innovation by providing seamless and coherent funding at every step from idea to market, from bench to bedside, so that participants can turn their breakthroughs into viable products and services.

The programme will support the research and innovation component of a range of major policy initiatives over the coming years, including the EU health strategy and the eHealth Action Plan.

Horizon 2020's mission is very clear - to carry out top quality health research with real impacts and to spark innovations with excellent commercial possibilities.

eHealth, the focus of this conference, is an important part of this mission and an opportunity to overcome some of the challenges to effective and efficient healthcare delivery.

One of the societal challenges that Horizon 2020 will tackle is "*Health, demographic change and wellbeing*".

Horizon 2020 will help researchers take decisive steps towards the development of a comprehensive and coordinated effort on health and wellbeing research in Europe, based on initiatives jointly implemented by the EU and its Member States and bringing together the public and private sectors.

But Horizon 2020 will also develop a global approach in another dimension.

Vice President Kroes, Commissioner Borg and I are joining forces to combine health research, innovation, ICT and health policy with the aim of improving lifelong health

and wellbeing for all, and to position Europe as a leader in the rapidly-expanding global market for health innovations.

Big challenges need appropriate resources. For this reason, we have proposed that of the six societal challenges tackled by Horizon 2020, the biggest budget should be allocated to this health challenge.

We need excellence in research to improve our understanding of health, disease, development and ageing and to translate this knowledge into innovative and effective products, strategies, interventions and services for the benefit of patients.

Ultimately, we want to contribute to the delivery of personalised healthcare. This includes effective health promotion which, supported by a robust evidence-base and effective surveillance and screening programmes, prevents disease, improves wellbeing and provides excellent value for money.

But personalised healthcare also includes genomics and the prospect this brings of carrying out – and applying – personal genome sequencing to choosing a suitable treatment. It also encompasses imaging and other diagnostic tools that will enable point-of-care identification of genes and biomarkers.

In this context, and encouraged by the success of the Innovative Medicines Initiative, we will also propose a new public-private partnership for innovative health research as part of Horizon 2020.

Like the IMI, this will be a partnership between industry and the European Commission, aimed at keeping open the development pipeline for new drugs and treatments in key public health areas.

Personalised healthcare will also need computer systems, e-infrastructures and associated communication networks and devices to organise and interpret the data needed for efficient integrated care. This would be of particular benefit to the increasing numbers of people suffering from chronic diseases.

On this point, a number of research infrastructures dedicated to biomedical research are currently being developed in Europe following their identification by the European Strategic Forum for Research Infrastructures - or ESFRI - in its strategic roadmap.

New e-Health applications can be built on some of these infrastructures; this is an opportunity that should definitely be exploited.

Finally, we also need to support, through research and innovation pilots, a broader uptake of technological, organisational and social innovations that can empower older people and people with disabilities to remain active and independent.

In this context, I'd like to mention the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing. The Partnership represents a new approach to cooperation on research and innovation, which is now moving at full speed to turn the strategy for active and healthy ageing into reality.

With the overall goal of adding two healthy years to the average lifespan by 2020, the Partnership fosters close cooperation across the research and innovation cycle, across supply and demand, and across sectors and policies, from public health, to digital, to industrial and innovation policy.

The Partnership seeks to translate innovative ideas into tangible products and services that respond to the concrete needs of the elderly.

The response from stakeholders shows a real drive in Europe to give us all better lifestyles and a higher quality of care.

At the same time, the Partnership aims to capitalise on the business opportunities in fulfilling the needs of our ageing society. Europe cannot miss out on the global commercial opportunities.

Public policies at national, regional and local level, on health, employment, research and innovation, are directly relevant to the challenge of active and healthy ageing.

So I would like to encourage Member States, regions and local authorities - and the health services they are responsible for - to mobilise all the instruments at their disposal, including public procurement, pilot initiatives, demonstration projects, standards and regulation in support of this Partnership.

Finally, let me also mention the Ambient Assisted Living Joint Programme. This is a 600 million Euro R&D funding programme, involving 23 countries and the European Union, to improve the quality of life of our senior citizens through the smart uses of information and communications technologies. Its success over the last six years means that we plan to reinforce this programme as part of Horizon 2020.

In this way we are keeping research and innovation for health at the forefront of our plans. And that's where they should be, since they can play such an important role in the on-going development and improvement of our health systems for the good of everyone in Europe.

Thank you
