Baltic eHealth - empowering regional development in the Baltic Sea Region -
Digital healthcare communication may assist in preventing a negative development spiral in many outlying, rural areas.

There is a distinct trend throughout the Baltic Sea Region for growth and progress to be concentrated in urban areas with rapid development, to the detriment of rural areas. Highly qualified personnel move to growth areas, where jobs and challenges are often to be found. Because of this, the rural and outlying areas often experience a decline in population and falling employment.

The same trend is found in all sectors that are dependent on information and communication technology (ICT) – including the health sector. Here development is focused not only on highly qualified specialists but also on the use of the latest technology. This entails a risk of healthcare provision being uneven, with the most advanced and specialised facilities being in the growth areas.

However, information and communication technology may also offer many opportunities for the decentralisation of knowledge and expertise. Advanced healthcare communication can bring the latest knowledge and the most advanced aids within reach, regardless of geographical distance. The means by which this can be accomplished is eHealth.

eHealth may give outlying areas entirely new opportunities to boost quality development in their healthcare facilities – for the benefit of citizens and employees in the health service. In this way, eHealth may help outlying areas to attract more growth and increase their population.

This is the core of the Baltic eHealth project, which focuses on developing practical and functional eHealth solutions across the countries in the Baltic Sea Region. This project will enable the Baltic Sea Region to lead the world in the digital exchange of healthcare services.
The goal
The overall goal of the project is to bring about fully developed eHealth solutions that can be directly put to use by health services throughout the Baltic Sea Region.

Ten players in five countries
Ten players in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Estonia and Lithuania are participating in the Baltic eHealth project. They each have their own core area; some are clinical partners that are familiar with digital healthcare communication, while others are experts in regional development.

eHealth
Test and examination results in the form of image and sound recordings are communicated digitally, typically from the small local hospital to specialists at a university hospital. In this way, the health professionals at the local hospital can obtain an expert assessment of the results. Examples of communication topics in eHealth are digital images as ultrasound scans and X-rays, teledermatology, telecardiology and telepsychiatry.

Baltic eHealth
The project will establish a Baltic Healthcare Network by connecting existing national and regional healthcare data networks in the participating countries and carry out full-scale eHealth trials within the fields of radiology and ultrasound. Furthermore, during the project period an analysis of how eHealth most effectively can combat rural migration will be conducted.

The result: An improvement of quality and regional development
Regardless of whether the patient can undergo a complete treatment process at the local hospital or might have to be transferred to another hospital, eHealth may mean that quality assurance of the decisive initial action takes place. The quality of healthcare provision can be raised, and this may be the factor that prompts a person to live in an outlying area.

At the same time, eHealth may help in making employment in the health service in outlying areas more appealing. It becomes easier to attract the right personnel – and this too may boost the quality of the available health services.
Specialist assessment of ultrasound scans
In many countries it is common practice to offer an ultrasound scan at 18 weeks of pregnancy. The objective of this scan is to assess the estimated day of delivery, locate the placenta, detect twins and triplets, but also to scan for fetal abnormalities. If any fetal abnormalities are found, it is frequently necessary to have a second opinion from an experienced colleague or to establish communication between two experienced health professionals regarding a particular case. In such a situation, eHealth can be of assistance since specialists in obstetrics and ultrasound are often situated at central hospitals in urban areas and not at a local rural hospital. For the pregnant woman, the benefit is that she will receive better information more quickly, thereby improving the quality of care for her and her unborn baby.

Examples:

Specialist assessment of digital images
Following a traffic accident, a person is admitted with a severe fracture of the pelvis. The local hospital takes digital images of the hip and pelvis. There are signs of fracture, and the initial feedback from the specialist unit is that a CT scan needs to be done. After the patient has been stabilised, he needs to be transferred to a trauma centre. All the patient’s digital test and examination results obtained in digital form are sent to the trauma centre as well, via the Baltic Health Network.

...eHealth may mean that quality assurance of the decisive initial action takes place...
Baltic Healthcare Network (BHN)
- National connection
- Regional connection
- Not connected yet

Clinical trials
- eUltrasound
- eRadiology
- Other partners

...connecting national and regional healthcare data networks...
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