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Integrated care: opportunities and challenges

Cohere conference, Vic, 3/4/2019

ABSTRACT

Discussing opportunities and challenges in integrated care starts necessarily with assessing some of the most significant changes the care sector has undergone during the last decades. Some of these changes are due to external factors, such as the availability of financial resources or demographic change (e.g. ageing, migration, etc.), others are more intrinsically related to the sector and refer to changes in the culture of care and the effect of emancipation and empowerment of patients and service users. Both the health and social care sectors are influenced by wider developments in society of which they are part. They have their own values, norms and codes of practice that do not necessarily coincide. As all economic sectors the care sector produces both innovation and resistance to change.

In my introductory presentation to the conference I will provide, from my personal perspective as service provider, an overview of changes and challenges in the care sector, particularly those related to the integration of services and technological innovation. I presume I will touch upon many of the issues that will be addressed in the further conference, trying to bind these together and thus providing a framework for discussion.

In my presentation I will look at the perception of disability and how international standards have impacted on that perception. Notwithstanding the increased perception of disability as a human rights issue and active and healthy ageing as an attractive phase of life, there are still important battles to win, particularly in “good treatment” and the prevention of maltreatment of persons with disabilities and vulnerable elderly. Raising awareness and training is an important tool in the struggle for better and safer services, just as deinstitutionalisation and a person-centred approach.

This will lead me to discuss the concept of integrated care and the difficulties in delivering on the concept of “integrated”. We will look at what integrated care actually involves, and we will discuss the impact of technology on the care sector and how technology is empowering people and organisations, but also the limitations it has, the risks it brings and the obstacles it meets. I will report findings from the ProACT project transferability study that has highlighted factors that impact on the implementation, upscaling of integrated care platforms and more precisely on their transfer between one context and another. Some of these factors are technology related and we will look at the opportunities and barriers for digital participation and see what is needed to make sure that the care sector fully takes up the challenges. A user requirements study implemented in the ProACT project has come up with relevant recommendations that can improve implementation of technology enabled integrated care. A checklist provided by the ENTELIS project will help us to understand and assess the dimensions of readiness of organisations to fully pick up technology for the benefit of their clients.

The conclusion will be that the care sector will need to move to higher outcomes in terms of cost-effectiveness and quality of person-centred services. Further research will need to be done to develop tools to measure outcomes in the deployment of technology that supports integrated care, but also tools that support change management as well as professional development of the workforce.

SHORT BIO

Evert-Jan Hoogerwerf is Head of the Assistive Technology and Project Departments of AIAS Bologna, an Association of disabled people and their families and a non-for profit independent provider of services to persons with disabilities in Italy. Born in the Netherlands he moved to Italy in 1990 where he started a career in the social sector. His area of interest is broad, including user involvement in service design, technology enabled participation of persons with disabilities, the digital divide, gender issues, technology in care. He is past president of the Association for the Advancement of Assistive Technology in Europe and board member of the European Association of Service Providers to Persons with Disabilities.

