

Primary Healthcare Information System in Albania: Ensuring System's Interoperability

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Abstract

Digital health infrastructure has been identified as an instrument for improving healthcare delivery and quality, public health, research and health-related activities in both low- and high-income countries. A key issue of IT systems in health is their interoperability, allowing information exchange between them, thus ensuring the appropriate and timely use of the collected information. In Albania, despite the formidable progress towards digitalization of the health system and primary health care, there is no information on the interoperability of such systems. This short review aimed to highlight the prerequisites for ensuring the interoperability of IT systems, as a critical element for its success. On the basic level, provider-to-patient and

provider-to-payer interoperability must be ensured. While moving towards an interoperable environment in healthcare, there are four levels (layers) of interoperability that must be considered: foundational, structural, semantical and organizational. At each level various requirements have to be met. Equally important are the standards of interoperability (unique identifier, vocabulary and terminologies, content, transport, privacy and security). To ensure the interoperability of IT systems in health in Albania one option could be the implementation of an open-source platform that supports interoperability, the most widely used being OpenHIM (open Health Information Mediator) from the OpenHIE (Open Health Information

Exchange) project. An overview of subsystems and modules for an electronic medical records (EMR) system for primary health care in Albania has been provided, arguing the associated benefits as well as organizational, physician-related and technical factors that have to be considered in the process.

Keywords: Albania, e-health, digital health, information technology, interoperability, primary health care.