13 European countries exchange patient data in Projectathon

Preparing for a large-scale pilot program of cross-border exchanges of patient data, 13 European countries participated in a Projectathon organized by European Patient Smart Open Services (epSOS) April 11 to 15, 2011 in Pisa, Italy.

Five software vendors who have developed key components used to interconnect the national systems also validated the interoperability of their systems with epSOS specifications during the Projectathon in Pisa.

The intensive connectivity marathon operated as a parallel testing event to the 11th annual IHE European Connectathon where 75 companies and health care organizations tested software emerging from the development pipeline for its ability to interoperate with other systems applying the IHE-developed integration profiles.

It was the second Projectathon organized by epSOS ahead of the pilot program launch set for June, 2011 that represents the world's most ambitious effort to date for the cross-border exchange of patient information.

Where first Projectathon among eight countries in November, 2010 in Bratislava, Slovakia presented little pre-testing requirements, national systems needed to pass a series of qualifications to participate in the Projectathon in Pisa.

According to the epSOS Coordinator Fredrik Linden, "the participation by more countries in Pisa despite more demanding requirements demonstrates national programs across Europe are reaching a level of expertise that is very promising as we prepare for live piloting."

He said that both Estonia and Turkey are new participants in the epSOS program who were able to meet the required testing specifications.

In June a first group of four expert countries will go live with real patient data exchanges and a second wave of five countries will join the pilot in September, said Linden.

When fully operational the large-scale epSOS pilot will engage more than 30,000 health care professionals exchanging patient summaries between 3,400 points of care.

There remain legal barriers for some countries such that they are not able to participate in the pilot program that uses real patient data sets, he said, adding that these countries are able to continue system development and testing with simulated patient data.

Modeled on the test methods used for the Connectathon, the epSOS Projectathon is a unique opportunity for interaction among program participants both technical and clinical, said Linden.

"Most of our engineers are experts who could perhaps perform much of the testing using on line tools back home," he said. "But the Projectathon takes the testing process one step further with collaboration and problem-solving in real time, face-to-face."

"It also creates an opportunity for epSOS to invite health care professionals to come and see and test the systems at work", he said.

To speak "European" among health care communities of Europe required creating a master set of some 10,000 terms to enable the exchange of the epSOS pilots.

"That number is likely to double when we send clinically more advanced patient summaries and ePrescriptions," said Linden.

He added, "the epSOS pilot program with 30,000 health care professionals may also seem massive, but when you consider the sheer size of the real world for health care in Europe you realize it is only a small part of the total number of people and medical centers who will be touched by electronic information exchanges in this step."