

France creates Interoperability guide for Hospital IT Managers

Specifying requirements for hospital IT systems just became a little easier in France.

To help project managers navigate the labyrinth of standards and protocols that define health IT infrastructure, the national association Interop'Santé published the first-ever, intra-hospital interoperability guide.

IHE-France is one of the three working groups that make up the Interop'Santé organization, along with HL7 (Health Level Seven) and the long-standing French association for harmonizing and promoting medical information systems (HPRIM) groups.

The collaboration of these groups ensures a solid consensus for the recommendations in the interoperability guide, according to Jean-Christophe Cauvin, IHE-France co-chair.

He said this first publication sets a framework that can now be further developed and updated.

To encourage widespread adoption and use, the guide is [available free as a PDF download](#).

Cauvin said the guide has met with "very positive feedback. It is clear everyone has been waiting for something like this."

"Interoperability is not something you do alone, working by yourself in a corner," he said. "For interoperability to work, everyone needs to be part of it."

Asked to create a call for tenders, project managers for hospital IT find themselves caught between conflicting internal demands and facing a jungle of confusing standards and requirements.

The result, he said, "are tender offers issued by hospital groups that are not always clear regarding the choice of standards, nor the the level of interoperability that will be reached."

By helping HIT project managers with consensus and recommendations the interoperability guide will level the playing field for providers of IT solutions with greater coherence in calls for offers.

To provide view of the big picture, the guide begins with a color-coded map offering an overview of six categories of IT processes within the hospital from patient admission through patient care and including support functions, such as laboratory and pharmacy, as well as billing. Each of these functional areas is then divided into blocks describing specific workflows.

For example, the category following a patient's clinical care includes subsets of functions for admission, planning, records of medical acts, prescription of medications and radiology reports.

The 56-page interoperability guide provides detailed schematics and recommended references for each subset. The descriptions of functions and actors that are implemented in IT solutions can be copied-and-pasted in many cases to help compile a call for tender.

On the map the expert group also rates the robustness of the recommended standards or protocols using traffic light colors. Green signals good coverage, while orange indicates only modest confidence, and red alerts managers to inadequate support.

As a result, while the map is comprehensive, there are gaps in confidence for standards in some functional areas and blanks on the landscape in some workflows.

Cauvin said the traffic light colors provide the working group's judgment as to the 'maturity' of available standards.

"We looked to see if the standard or profile is well-aligned with work processes used in hospitals, whether there are use cases supporting the profile, and how well the standard is supported with updates and continual development," he said.

He cites the example of laboratory reporting. For more than 10 years French hospitals have shared a standard (HPRIM Santé) pioneered by the former HPRIM association. Yet the expert group determined this standard was degrading due to a lack of updates and progressively proprietary

interpretations by software developers that moves in the opposite direction from the movement toward interoperability.

Impressed with the robustness and maturity of the IHE Laboratory Domain, the experts gave a green light to these integration profiles.

IHE integration profiles are recommended by the Interop'Santé group in many areas, Cauvin said, significantly in the radiology domain.

But he said the interoperability guide also recognizes well-established standards developed uniquely in France.

For example, while the IHE Pharmacy domain was recently launched, the expert group found the SIPh2 standard already in use in France to be more mature.

For billing, the complexity of coding and rules for the French health insurance scheme also requires the uniquely French solutions of HPRIM XMLv1.06 rather than the HL7 standards.

The "Guide to Intra-Hospital Interoperability" from Interop'Santé complements the work of ASIP Santé, an agency of the French Ministry of Health that last year published an interoperability framework for the exchange of clinical documents between hospitals as well as repositories for shared records, such as the national Dossier Médical Patient.

The guide from Interop'Santé completes the chain of workflow by navigating the standards within the walls of the hospital.