

IHE-Turkey creates platform to advance national networks

IHE-Europe reached the eastern edge of the continent when it welcomed IHE-Turkey as one of the newest national initiatives to join the organization.

Utku Şenol, MD, is the chairman of the recently formed IHE-Turkey association, organized as a working group of the Turkish Medical Informatics Association with the sponsorship of the Turkish Society of Radiology and the Turkish Medical Imaging Association.

“We hope to serve as a platform for gathering the growing number of groups who are interested in IHE and then serve as a forum for discussion,” said Dr. Şenol.

“IHE-Turkey can also serve as a liaison and an interface with the Turkish Ministry of Health and medical societies to advance programs that aim to improve the delivery of public health services,” he said.

As a national initiative the association intends to encourage companies developing health information systems, radiology systems and picture archiving and communication systems (PACS) to integrate IHE profiles in equipment and protocols.

As chairman for IHE-Turkey, Dr. Şenol works with three vice-chairs, two representing vendors of health systems and one representing users of systems.

“One of our first objectives for IHE-Turkey is to create greater awareness of IHE and to engage with the international community of IHE users and developers,” he said.

“For the moment, technical issues are not as important as sharing an appreciation of how users can benefit from the IHE solutions, and how radiologists can contribute to the IHE solutions,” he said.

IHE-Turkey will introduce presentations on IHE interoperability at the annual congress of the Medical Informatics Association and the national meeting of the radiology society.

A member of the Faculty of Medicine at Akdeniz University, Dr. Şenol said he has progressively introduced sessions on DICOM, HL7 and networks to the radiology residents’ program, and now IHE will become part of the course to train new radiologists.

Over the past few years a national program called National Health Information Studies (NHIS) has resulted in an emerging e-health infrastructure for Turkey that is based on several international standards.

In 2008 the government became interested in IHE as a method for assuring interoperability across the country and published recommendations for PACS, encouraging hospitals to implement IHE profiles and purchase products compliant with IHE.

Dr. Şenol said the Turkish Ministry of Health completed a network connecting hospitals in the eastern part of the country back to Ankara for consultations, and all government-run hospitals in Istanbul are now connected by a network.

“Teleradiology has been taken up rapidly in Turkey,” he said, “with many small and large companies trying to introduce different systems, and the Ministry is going forward implementing several projects.”

“It has proven to be very useful to provide sub-specialty consultations in radiology, for example,” he said.

“Here IHE plays a critical role with the XDS-I and Keynotes profiles,” he said.

“Technically these projects are working, but clinically there remain issues to resolve,” he said, which explains the interest of the medical societies in creating a national initiative for IHE.

“It is critical to integrate the technology while also recognizing radiology is a clinical process that is more than reporting images and data,” he said.