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**The Electronic Health Record (ELGA) in Austria**

*Abstract:*

*In der Elektronischen Gesundheitsakte »ELGA« wird eine Teilmenge der Krankengeschichte eines Patienten abhängig vom Willen des Patienten orts- und zeitunabhängig für berechtigte Personen abrufbar sein. Diese relevanten gesundheitsbezogenen Daten werden sich auf eine eindeutig identifizierte Person beziehen. Die Daten und Informationen stammen von einem oder mehreren verschiedenen Gesundheitsdiensteanbietern oder vom Patienten selbst. Sie werden bedarfsgerecht aufbereitet sein. Der Abruf darf nur von berechtigten Personen entsprechend der definierten Rollen und im Einklang mit dem Datenschutzrecht und anderen anwendbaren Gesetzen erfolgen. Datenschutz und Datensicherheit sind unverzichtbare Voraussetzungen für die Verwirklichung der ELGA.*

*Für die Umsetzung von ELGA sind folgende Basiskomponenten erforderlich:*

*Ein bundesweiter Patienten-Index*

*Ein einheitlicher Index der Gesundheitsdiensteanbieter*

*Ein Dokumentenregister, das Verweise zu den einzelnen Dokumenten enthält*

*Ein Rollen- und Berechtigungssystem*

*Ein Internet Portal, das dem Patienten Zugang zu seinen eigenen Daten ermöglicht und fachlich abgesicherte Gesundheitsinformationen anbietet*

*Zu den größten Herausforderungen zählt die Umsetzung von ELGA in einer föderalen Struktur mit teilweise sehr weit entwickelten lokalen elektronischen Patientenakten in den Spitälern und Krankenanstaltenverbänden. Für die niedergelassenen Ärzte wird ELGA einen verbesserten Informationsfluss bedeuten, der das Gesundheitssystem dem Ziel der »integrierten Versorgung« einen Schritt näher bringt. Die Planung und Umsetzung erfolgt schrittweise und unter Beteiligung*

*von Ärzten und Vertretern aller anderen Systempartner, um ELGA möglichst bedürfnisorientiert zu gestalten.*

*Das größte Potential von ELGA liegt in der Stärkung der Patientenrechte, vor allem des Rechts auf Information über den eigenen Gesundheitszustand und in der Stärkung der Patientenautonomie.*

The Electronic Health Record (EHR) or 'Elektronische Gesundheitsakte' (ELGA) aims to integrate the various but isolated systems of IT-based health data management that exist within Austria.

ELGA will, it is anticipated, help promote the implementation of integrated care, in particular, through enabling better cooperation between the secondary/acute care sectors and the primary/community care sectors.

Currently, hospitals are the leaders in information communication technology (ICT) based data management and storage. Some of them have already implemented local EHR solutions allowing several units within one hospital as well as clusters of hospitals to gain access to specific health data. Doctors are, however, more reluctant to use IT for the management of patient data. It is intended to put all health care providers on a technical level playing field by means of ELGA. Data will originate from health care providers as well as from patients and will be stored at the individual healthcare provider's facilities or in a hospital.

The highest levels of data security and data protection are indispensable preconditions for a successful implementation. Access to data will be restricted to authorised health care providers working in hospitals as well to doctors, laboratories and pharmacists.

ELGA is designed to increase the information levels of doctors, patients, nurses and pharmacists. At the same time, the electronic health record will have an impact on established ways of cooperation and communication in the health care system. Being a strongly technology-driven process, the introduction of ELGA might prompt some skepticism for instance in respect of privacy issues and a potential increase in bureaucracy required to operate the new system.

Thus, a broad and in-depth process of information and communication has been an essential prerequisite to implementation. The dossier “Outlook on the first implementation phase of ELGA in Austria“ was subject to a broad consultation process before being approved by the Federal Health Commission in May 2007.

Consequently, representatives of the main stakeholders as well as legal and privacy experts have been integrated in the subsequent creation of the “masterplan” for the IT architecture and main functionalities which was finished in autumn 2007.

Since then, further features of ELGA have been shaped by six project teams consisting of the key representatives of the main partners of the health system, i.e. doctors, pharmacists, carers, social security and the federal and regional administration. The findings of planning teams will again be submitted to the Federal Health Commission for approval. Additionally, a cost-benefit analysis has been carried out.

#### Potential for greater patient focus

The new ELGA clearly has much potential for strengthening patient information and patient empowerment.

ELGA is destined to give doctors and patients faster access to more and better quality information about their health status. With all relevant data retrievable in ELGA, delays can be reduced and therapy can start earlier. Redundant checks which are often burdensome for the patient (and at the same time costly for the health system) can be reduced or avoided.

Health care providers are also expected to benefit from the comfort of the “full picture” of a patient’s condition as well as from a higher quality of communication with their colleagues and improved data management. In the long run, it is envisaged that the patient can access his own record and feed data into the system by means of a personalized internet portal. Thus patient information will be enhanced. Patients groups have already been contacted by the ELGA team in order to integrate their needs in the design of ELGA’s functionalities as much as possible.

## Integrated care in a federal state

Austria's constitution as a federal state consisting of nine provinces (Laender) and a federal entity (Bund) provides a special challenge when it comes to the implementation of ELGA. The legislative competence is shared between the Bund and the Laender whereas the vast majority of hospitals in Austria are run by the Laender. Furthermore, social security is state funded but organised as an autonomous body. In this environment, it is crucial to create interfaces for the sake of integrated care and encourage communication in order to avoid redundant investments. Consequently, the task force for the implementation of ELGA (Arge ELGA) which was installed in July 2006 consists of representatives of the Bund, Laender and the social security. The step by step implementation is based on regular consultation of all system partners and the decisions of the Federal Health Commission.

## ELGA and the law

Implementation also has a number of legal implications, first and foremost privacy law. Notwithstanding the Austrian Data Protection Act, the EU Data Protection Directive 95/46 EC (especially Art 6 and 8) is a main provision to comply with. The challenge for legislators is to establish a balance between the right to privacy and the right to patient information. Long established legal acts already oblige doctors and hospitals to file patient documentation. The more recent Health Telematics Act provides rules for the electronic exchange of health data and respective information management.

ELGA will only be accessible for authorised health professionals and thus have an impact on the relevant health profession legislation. For legal questions concerning patient identification (which is also a precondition for data protection) the data procession rules of the E-Government Act might serve as a role model.

## ELGA's IT-Architecture

The basic components of ELGA are

- a nation wide Patient Index
- a Health Service Provider Index
- a Document Registry providing links to the documents
- an Authorisation System
- an Internet Portal providing high quality health information as well as an individual and secure access to personal data

The core applications of the first implementation phase will consist of the electronic discharge summary, an e-Report laboratory, an e-Report radiology and an e-medication tool.

The ELGA-IT-Architecture will be built on an international framework of health related IT-standards, the so-called "Integrating the Health Care Enterprise" (IHE) standards. The IT architecture contains crucial elements of data safety. A special audit layer ensures full control over all retrievals and the detection of abuse. Patient autonomy will be implemented by means of a profile designed to allow for opt-in and opt-out of patients with regard to the accessibility of their individual data.

More information about ELGA can be found on the following websites:

[www.arqe-elga.at](http://www.arqe-elga.at)

[www.bmgfj.gv.at](http://www.bmgfj.gv.at)

[www.ihe.net](http://www.ihe.net)