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HUNGARY

CREATING AN ENABLING REGULATION FOR TELEMEDICINE

BACKGROUND



Prior to the pandemic, telemedicine was present in Hungary's health-care system, but its potential was far from realized. As a result, Hungary did not have all-encompassing telemedicine regulation in place. Instead, different pieces of regulation provided the legal framework.

With the spread of COVID-19, the need for telemedicine became pressing and developments in the field of digital health accelerated. The Ministry of Human Capacities and its professional advisory board recognized the need to create a more uniform

and functional regulatory environment for telemedicine. The Hungarian Government responded by introducing a temporary set of legal provisions that health-care providers could easily apply during the pandemic. These covered a wide range of long-distance services such as patient and clinician contact, care, advice, reminders, interventions, monitoring, and remote admissions.

The regulation introduced by the Ministry of Human Resources enabled health-care providers to set up their own telemedicine protocols and provide telemedicine services in a regulated manner while respecting patient safety. However, these rules were only in effect during the state of emergency, which was lifted in June 2020.

New amendments to a temporary decree were introduced in September 2020 to provide a permanent framework for telemedicine. They also introduced the basic minimum infrastructural requirements and funding rules for the provision of some telemedicine services, and for their public funding in primary and specialist care.

THE TECHNOLOGY



According to the new decree, telemedicine services are defined as: (i) specific health services that can be provided without physical contact, and (ii) the sharing of health data via telecommunication means according to the Act on the Protection of Health Data. The services include:

- scheduling of appointments for diagnosis and therapeutic advice;
- consultations;
- issuance of medical admissions for further examinations;

- patient management tasks;
- care services;
- provision of therapy and rehabilitation; and
- prescribing of medicines and medical devices.

The regulation also introduces the following new requirements for health service providers (HSPs):

- HSPs must procure the necessary telecommunication devices, medical devices and specific devices for health services requiring a video connection by law.
- HSPs must set out the procedural rules and

provide the patient information sheet for the use of telemedicine services. They are responsible for patient identification.

- When telemedicine services are conducted online, HSPs must provide a stable and secure connection that ensures data security as well as virus and malware protection.

The costs of offering telemedicine can now be accounted against the State Health Insurance Fund by using the new set of financial codes for telemedicine services (when the provider has an appropriate contract).

IMPACT

The increased use of telemedicine has enabled the Hungarian health-care system to provide continued care during the pandemic. The country has seen a noticeable increase in doctor–patient contacts, and the number of reported teleconsultations increased to over 119 000 in January 2021.

The new legal regulation and public financing rules, combined with growing acceptance from health-care providers and patients, could help pave the way for the widespread use of telemedicine in Hungary.

MORE INFORMATION

OECD Health Working Paper No. 116. Bringing health care to the patient: an overview of the use of telemedicine in OECD countries:

[https://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=DELSA/HEA/WD/HWP\(2020\)1&docLanguage=En](https://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=DELSA/HEA/WD/HWP(2020)1&docLanguage=En)

KEY LEARNING

- **Significant steps have been taken to reduce the lack of appropriate legislation and the absence of public financing.**
- **The introduction of new regulation was necessary to enable the increased use of telemedicine.**
- **An increased use of telemedicine comes with the responsibility to create a secure and compliant environment for such services, where the safety of both the patient and their data is ensured.**