Chapter 5.5
E–Learning in Healthcare and Social Care

Maria Kalogeropoulou
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

Maria Bastaki
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

Polyxeni Magoulia
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

ABSTRACT

E-learning has the potential to transform learning for healthcare and social care, supporting the aims of the NHS Plan and raising standards of care for patients and service users across health and social care. This chapter sets out a vision of healthcare and social care services in the 21st century, and a strategy for making it a reality. The authors present and discuss here the basic principles and benefits of e-learning for healthcare professionals, medical students, and patient education.

INTRODUCTION

E-learning is the use of interactive technologies to support and improve learning. It is not just about online courses. E-learning can include a range of technologies from CD-ROMs (compact disc read-only memory) to electronic whiteboards or online simulations. It should usually include some form of support, whether face to face or electronic, and can often be blended with classroom methods. It can offer learners and tutors many services, including access to resources, information, and advice. It can reduce the time spent on administration, and help with the planning, recording, and tracking of learning and development. An e-learning strategy is therefore really an aspect of a strategy for effective learning.

E-learning has the potential to transform learning for health and social care, supporting the aims of the NHS Plan and raising the standards of care for patients and service users across health and social care. This document sets out a vision of

health- and social-care services in the 21st century and a strategy for making it a reality. The vision is of a health and social sector in which:

- Patients and service users have the information they need to be involved in their own care, and know that staff have the skills and expertise to give them the highest standards of care,
- All health- and social-care staff can access the learning opportunities and support they need to develop personally and professionally,
- Flexible learning is a central part of everyday work for everyone,
- The highest standards of professionalism are found throughout all occupations and communities,
- People share knowledge, resources, expertise, and good practice within and across their communities, and
- Resources are used effectively to provide lifelong learning and continuous development opportunities for all staff now and in the long term.

In the past, involvement in learning has been largely a matter of personal preference and opportunity, governed by the individual's own motivation, their seniority, the availability of suitable learning, and the support of colleagues and supervisors. Increasingly, factors such as the ones listed here mean that learning is becoming a central part of everyone's working life:

- The rapidly changing workplace
- A more competitive job market
- Increased emphasis on teamwork
- Informal learning
- Technology
- The need for professionalism

E-learning is increasingly widely used by learners in schools, colleges, and universities. It is also widely used in work-based learning and corporate education, and in industry and the public sector. E-learning is therefore a significant factor in the personal and professional development of the 1.2-million-plus people who work in the health sector, and the 1.4 million who work in social care. Clearly, e-learning is important when it comes to acquiring job-related knowledge and skills.

CAPABILITIES AND BENEFITS OF E-LEARNING

E-learning strategy sets out generic e-learning capabilities for the education sector. It is useful to look at how these could apply to health and social care.

- **Individualized Learning:** Meeting the needs of all staff, including those working in remote locations, in the home, or in small organizations, or whose work requires them to be mobile
- **Personalized Learning Support:** Exploring learning pathways and resources, finding the right courses and materials, and tracking work-based learning
- **Collaborative Learning:** Including collaboration between learners on work-based projects or action research (on, for example, national service frameworks), and supporting health informatics communities or health- and social-care interprofessional groups
- **Tools for Educators and Employees:** Support for innovation by customizing or creating learning resources or simulations
- **Virtual Learning Worlds:** Online master's classes and simulations, and access to virtual campuses or wider learning environments
- **Flexible Study:** On-demand learning, which people can access when and where they need it

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