How Should We Define eHealth, and Does the Definition Matter?

Chris SHOWELL and Christian NØHR
eHealth initiatives

- Involve significant expenditure:
  - Money
  - Time
  - Expertise

- May provide significant benefits:
  - Safer care
  - Better efficiency
  - Improved access
Measuring outcomes

- Where are we spending all this money, time and expertise?
- What are we getting as a result?
- Does eHealth deliver good value for money?
eHealth is not well defined

Brief literature review:

- Oh (2005) found 51 possible descriptions of eHealth, but little consensus
- We could not find any other published consensus definition of eHealth

A few questions…

- Are you aware of a clear definition that we have missed?

- Do you have a clear personal view of what is meant by “eHealth”?
  *(Show of hands, please, if the answer is “Yes”)*

- Is that just your view, or is it a view shared with your colleagues?
  *(Leave you hand up if it’s shared)*
What is a definition?

A definition should include:

- The term name itself;
- A specification of the object of the definition activity; and
- An example.

It may also include a reference, and notes to amplify or clarify aspects of the definition.
Is eHealth an example of...

- Structure?
- Process?
- Function?

Donabedian, A. (1966). Evaluating the Quality of Medical Care. The Milbank Quarterly, 44(3(2)), 166–203
Some more questions...

• Should we have an agreed definition of eHealth?
  *(Show of hands again, please, for “Yes”*)

• How big a problem is the lack of a definition?
  *(Hands up for: )*  
  • Major/Significant  
  • Minor  
  • None
Finding a definition

- Internet based process
  - A “tech-literate” bias
  - Probably acceptable

- Delphi method
  - No egos, no arguments; all voices equal
  - Multiple rounds

- Multiple perspectives:
  - Academics, health providers, patients, vendors
Participation welcome

Register at:

www.define-ehealth.com