

Health Care Systems in Australia and across the developed world are in crisis. As medical innovations continue to enhance our ability to fight disease and prolong life, ageing populations have transformed the nature and demand for increasingly expensive medical procedures, medications and health care services. Looking to 2020 and beyond, without significant change Australia's health care system will experience increasing costs, growing complexity in health service demands and escalating work-loads on health professionals. These changes are likely to be accompanied by declining overall system affordability and reduced equity of, and access to, quality care for many Australians.

It is perhaps not surprising therefore that health reform continues to be a major item on political and policy agendas. Alongside changes to Medicare, health system funding arrangements, medical insurances and the legal and regulatory environment, eHealth initiatives have been identified as major drivers for stimulating the changes necessary to address this crisis. By opening up opportunities for increased information access, cost effectiveness, improved information delivery, update and evaluation the economic case for more information and communication technologies (ICTs) is strong. However, this deployment also raises a number of socio-technical, clinical and legal challenges that have become increasingly evident as the implementation of more sophisticated ICTs solutions have met with mixed success or failed to generate their forecast benefits.

eHealth innovations clearly have huge potential to support a 'better connected health system' and the realisation of a vision of future health care system that is: more efficient, safer, knowledge-based, patient centred and provides universal, accessible and affordable care. However, many approaches to eHealth continue to downplay existing levels of complexity and uncertainty that exist in the delivery of health care services and make problematic assumptions about how ICTs will benefit patients, health professionals and the health care system as a whole.

Drawing on an awareness of arguments about the 'IT productivity paradox' and insights that highlight the socially and historically constructed dimensions of contemporary health discourses, the eHealth Services research group adopts a healthy scepticism towards the claims made about how ICTs will improve system efficiency and effectiveness, lower costs and improve the quality and availability of care. More specifically, this research group is underpinned by an ethos that argues the potential of eHealth to enable future health care systems to 'do more and better with (relatively) less' will only be realised if ICTs are specifically designed, implemented and evaluated on the basis of a detailed understanding of end-users and their changing needs and complex interactions with one another, the health system and the wider environment.

The eHealth Services Research group conducts research that aims to:

- Deploy human-centred design approaches to the design, implementation and evaluation of information systems;
- Critically analyse arguments around eHealth; and,
- Ensure a focus on patients and their experiences and concerns in discussions of eHealth benefits.