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News

E-script initiatives in confusion

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Hopes for a system that will eliminate paper prescriptions and hook doctors up with pharmacists appear to be in confusion as joint ventures dissolve, the Pharmacy Guild switches allegiances and the government reviews its own model.

Originally announced by the Guild in March this year as ScriptX, the idea has morphed into eRx Script Exchange. Former joint venture partners, GP software vendor Health Communications Network (HCN) and pharmacy software vendor Corum Health have parted company with the project's main promoter, Fred Health - one of Corum's competitors, although the groups remain in discussions according to Fred Health CEO, Paul Naismith.

Fred Health re-announced the re-named project last week with new joint venture partners, Simpl - a New Zealand software company - and the Health and Human Services division of Microsoft.

Pharmacy Guild National President, Kos Sclavos, threw his support behind eRx, saying: "Having supported the original ScriptX proposal we are keen to back this new initiative as it extends the key elements of patient choice, security and performance. Our support includes purchasing the first 10 million eRx Script Exchange transactions for our members."

This was the same deal that the Guild had promised the original joint venturers but, despite appearances, it does not necessarily indicate that ScriptX is dead.

"The ScriptX project is on hold, until such time as a viable commercial model emerges and DoHA (the Department of Health and Ageing) clarifies its intentions for developing a government owned e-prescribing system following their recent engagement of KPMG regarding e-prescribing," said HCN Managing Director, John Frost.

KPMG is currently conducting a consultation and review of e-prescribing on behalf of the department which will advise of whether the system should be private sector or government owned.

Mr Naismith said the original partners had believed that without a clear government policy, the risks of the project were too large but Fred Health believed it was important not to wait. "Hopefully they will come back to the project when the risk seems less," he said.

He admitted that, without HCN on board, it would be difficult to engage GPs in the project but said Fred Health was also talking to other software vendors.

The Guild freely admits that in backing both the ScriptX and eRx proposals, it is trying to get its preferred 'postbox' system - in which GPs upload e-scripts to a central point for pharmacies to download when patients ask - established before the government can move on another system.

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