

SEARCH

AcceSing DistributEd Digital ARChives for Health Scientific Dissemination

*Hypothesis of an eContentPlus proposal to be submitted in the 1st Call 2005
(deadline 11 Nov 2005)*

Foreword

In the last decade, the massive adoption of digital technologies by the European Health sector has led to the construction of large archives which nowadays contain million of high resolution digital images and clinical data. The storage of such information is often a law prerequisite but, so far, in very few occasions specific actions have been carried out to grant access to these data for training and scientific research & dissemination purposes.

Unexpectedly the hurdles related to the access to such information do not come from legal or privacy restrictions, as the majority of these data could be easily anonymised, but from the simple fact so far Information Technologies have not been properly deployed to ease both the access and research activities through these numerous and heterogeneous data.

Beside the difficulties related to the access to such data, which are primarily due to a poor deployment of proper ITs solutions, even in the very few cases these data are accessible (e.g. for reference, clinical researches, etc), the access is normally granted only to a small number of the medical personnel of the data owning organisation (e.g./ hospitals, Local Health Authorities, etc.). So, as a matter of fact, nowadays the diffusion of this knowledge is highly restricted both at national and international level.

Focus of the proposal

The SEARCH targeted project addresses the objective highlighted in the eContentPlus workprogramme related to the introduction of an enabling infrastructure specifically conceived to facilitate the diffusion of scientific and scholarly content through the Health sector specialists.

Each day the major European Health Excellence Centres (from now on EHEC) carry out advanced clinical exams on patients affected by different pathologies. The results of such exams are thousands of high definition digital images and several digital information related to their health conditions.

The scope of SEARCH is involving these EHEC, re-organise their digital archives and deploy the most suitable technologies to allow an easy access and research functions to the European medical community.

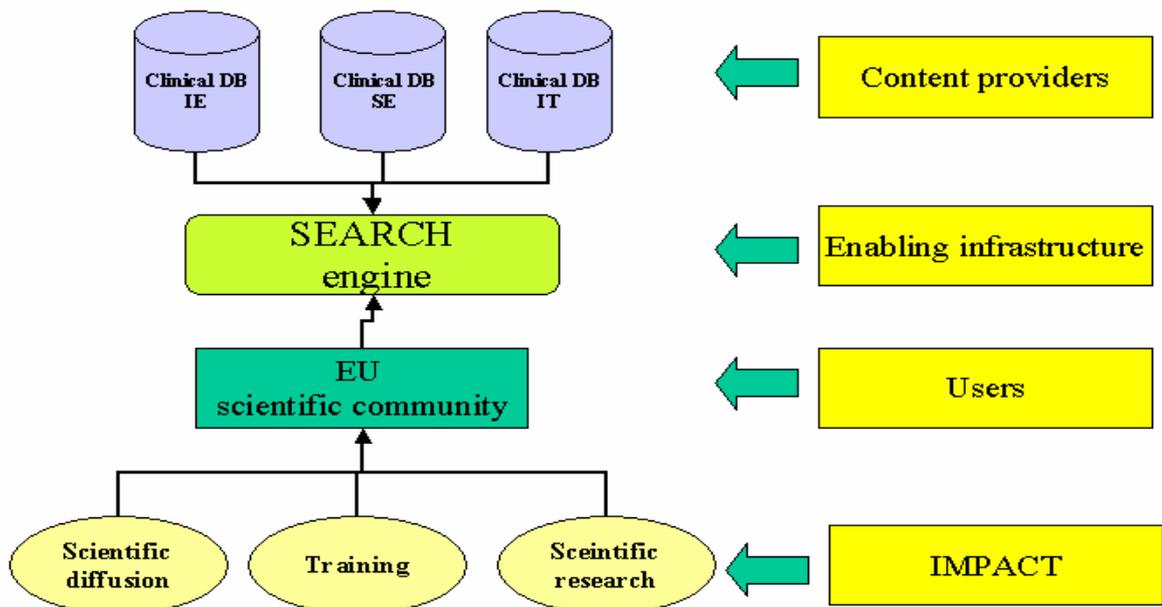
To achieve such ambitious objective, the SEARCH project will:

- create an European network of clinical EHEC databases: initially the SEARCH network will be composed only by the EHEC involved in the SEARCH project but a specific set of project activities are expressly planned and will be carried out in order to promote such initiative and attract other content providers able to enrich the SEARCH Network both under the quantitative and qualitative side. The consortium is aware of the importance related to the attainment of a critical mass of data especially to enable users to perform advanced epidemiological researches;
- deploy user friendly Information Technologies able to grant easy access / research and multilingual functionalities able to maximise the dissemination of scientific content and thus enhance the synergies among the European medical community;
- investigate pricing strategies to allow both the sustainability and the growth of the SEARCH network: a specific business model will be investigate to guarantee the growth of the network itself.

The success of the project will thus allow users (eg/ medics, scholars, pupils, pharmaceutical industry, research labs, etc) to easily access and use the stored information as reference material or as raw data to perform, for example, to carry out advanced epidemiological researches through datamining and GRID technologies.

Thus SEARCH will be a useful tool both for dissemination of medical knowledge, as a decision support tool and as precious source of information for scientific research.

Fig 1 - SEARCH project architecture



Expected impact of the SEARCH project

Beside the contribution to the *eContentPlus Programme* which SEARCH will address through the deployment of an enabling infrastructure (e.g./ the SEARCH engine), the project will also support the achievement of the goals highlighted in the *European Health Protection Strategy* set by the Commission. In fact, as clearly stated in the Commissioner Byrne report¹:

*“EU Health policy must be based on solid grounds: facts, data and scientific evidence. Health authorities, citizens and health professionals need reliable information. These are the reasons why the European Commission is committed to **providing a strong knowledge base for European action**. This would entail developing EU-wide analysis of health data to provide objective, comparable, and timely information on which to base more effective health policies at national and EU levels.”*

The SEARCH software will be specifically customised to ease the access and the sharing of this valuable information among the European medical community. By doing so, the project is expected to strengthen the co-operation among the European medical community thus enhancing its performance and, subsequently, the services provided to all the European citizens.

Additionally, once the SEARCH network will reach a critical mass, it will act also as a precious resource to carry out advanced scientific researches (e.g. epidemiological researches, etc) able to enhance medical treatments and pharmaceutical production and administration.

Participants²

- Engisanità S.p.a. – Italy - Project co-ordinator
- Ospedale San Giovanni Roma – Italy
- Università La Sapienza- Roma – Italy **con annesso Ospedale**
- Hospital – Ireland **(to be confirmed)**
- Hospital – Sweden **(to be confirmed)**
- Hospital OR University Eastern country **(to be confirmed)**

Expression of interest

The receivers of this document are kindly asked to non-disclose any of the SEARCH project information and express their will to take part in the project by the 15th of September 2005.

¹ “*Enabling Good Health For All - A reflection process for a new EU health strategy*”, David Byrne, ISBN 92-894-8172-2, European Communities, 2004

² as of 1st Sept 2005

To express your interest to take part in the proposal and for any possible request of information please do not hesitate to contact:

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