Google rivals Microsoft with new personal medical record service

Reuters

ORLANDO: Google has unveiled a new plan for patients who want to gain control of their medical records. At the 2008 Annual Conference of the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society in Florida, USA, Chief Executive Eric Schmidt said that his company has signed deals with leading US hospitals and medical companies, such as Aetna Inc and Walmart Stores Inc pharmacies, to help them securely share sensitive health data.

Schmidt said it would likely be a few months before Google Health is offered widely. The password-protected web service will store health records on Google computers, with a medical services directory that lets users import doctors’ records, drug history and test results. Google aims to foster sharing of information between these services, but keep control in patients’ hands, allowing them to schedule appointments or refill prescriptions. Schmidt said that his company has no plan to sell ads on the new service and aims to make money indirectly when users search for other medical information.

Earlier this year, Google announced it will team up with a leading academic medical research clinic, Cleveland Clinic, to test a data exchange that puts patients in charge of records. Many other companies—such as IBM, Oracle Corp and Siemens—have already worked on such digitization and Google’s biggest rival, Microsoft, has recently introduced HealthVault, a hub to collect, store and share personal medical information on the internet.

While medical providers are covered by US privacy laws, there is little in the way of established privacy, security and data usage standards for electronic personal health records. Google said it is prepared to resist fishing expeditions by lawyers seeking to subpoena personal medical records stored on Google Health. Last year, it went to court to defeat an effort by the US Justice Department to request some Google search records. “We’ve taken a pretty aggressive position in a pro-consumer way in the US, but I do want to assure you we are subject to US law,” Schmidt said.
New survey claims high satisfaction with dental tourism worldwide
Figures reveal high patient rating for clinics in Thailand

Daniel Zimmermann
DTI

LEIPZIG: Dentists in affluent, high-priced markets, such as North America, Japan, Australia, and Western Europe may need to keep an eye on overseas and cross-border competition in the form of dental tourism.

A dental tourism survey by RevaHealth.com, a medical and dental tourism search engine in Dublin, Ireland, claims “high levels of satisfaction” among dental tourists it polled. “Patients who traveled abroad to receive treatment revealed an average satisfaction rating of 84 per cent, along with an average cost saving of US$6,400, or 60 per cent of the cost of their treatment locally,” the company says in a release.

More than 95 per cent of respondents to RevaHealth.com’s survey cited cost as the main reason they opted to receive dental treatment abroad. However, they listed quality as the deciding factor in determining which clinic they went to.

“Patients reported wide variations in the amount of the money they saved and in the abilities of certain clinics to communicate effectively,” RevaHealth.com says. “There were also variations in satisfaction between countries as a whole, with patient satisfaction highest overall for clinics in Hungary, Poland and Thailand.”

Thailand has recently become one of the most popular destinations for medical tourists in Asia, earning the country more US$1 billion a year. The Thai government has invested in many areas of the country’s burgeoning medical tourism market, from speeding visa clearance for patients to guaranteeing the highest standards through accreditation programmes. According to Revahealth, 90 per cent of Australian dental patients that go abroad are visiting the country for treatment.

Oral flu vaccine under development

SEOUL: Physicians and dentists may soon be able to vaccinate patients against the flu and other illnesses. Researcher Song Joo-Hye and her colleagues at the International Vaccine Institute (IVI) in Seoul have found that sublingual administration of an experimental flu vaccine is highly effective in protecting mice from influenza virus infection. When the flu vaccine was applied under the tongue, the animals developed robust immune responses in their lungs and were fully protected from the disease when later exposed to a more severe form of the influenza virus.

The study is based on an earlier study, conducted by the IVI in collaboration with the National Institute for Health and Medical Research in France and the Gothenburg University in Sweden. In addition to offering a convenient and safe way to deliver vaccines without needles, scientists in that study found the sublingual route helps to overcome the degradation of antigens during their transit through the gastrointestinal tract, and failure to induce strong immune responses in the respiratory tract — the two main drawbacks of orally administered vaccines. “Moreover, the findings suggested that this method of vaccine administration poses no risk of antigen redirection to the central nervous system, which is a potential risk of administering influenza vaccines intranasally,” added Dr. Kweon Mi-Na, chief of the IVI’s mucosal immunology laboratory.

“These studies provide a basis for further human testing of this alternative form of needle-free vaccination,” said Dr. Cecil Czerkinsky, IVI Deputy Director-General for Laboratory Science. “Aside from its convenience, sublingual vaccination appears to disseminate immunity to a broader range of organs than the classic routes of injecting or ingesting vaccines.” If these findings are replicated in humans, they could pave the way for the development of a new generation of vaccines that could be used for mass vaccination against respiratory infections, including the pandemic avian-human influenza viruses.

Dr. John Clemens, IVI Director-General said, “These studies are important milestones for the IVI. Sublingual vaccination is an entirely new approach to the delivery of vaccines; this approach offers the possibility of vaccinating against a variety of infections without the risks posed by delivering vaccines with needles.”