



TELEHEALTH QUALITY GROUP MEMBERS’ CHARTER

This **Members’ Charter** has been adopted by the Telehealth Quality Group (TQG) as a means by which all members re-affirm their credentials as ethical and responsible organisations. Only with a commitment to such approaches can the TQG be justified in its specific purpose of ‘promoting high quality standards in telehealth services in the European Union and internationally’.¹ It follows that members of the TQG share that purpose – whether as policy-makers, commissioners or procurers, manufacturers or suppliers, service providers, researchers or consultants. Indeed, the **Charter** can be seen as underpinning good and defensible telehealth practice.

The very nature of the TQG as an EEIG (European Economic Interest Group) supports the perspective of this **Charter**. EEIGs are partnerships and carry an ‘aim to facilitate or develop the economic activities of its members’.² This means that the TQG, as well as recognising the important role of public and third sector bodies, positively supports commercial activity. It understands the importance of the markets in which commercial organisations operate. The TQG sees, however, the necessity of ‘raw’ commercial objectives being balanced by wider considerations that relate to the health and well-being of people who access telehealth services and to the communities in which they live and work.

In fulfilling the aim to promote high quality telehealth standards the TQG acts as a catalyst by which networking takes place between its members and others; with knowledge being shared across different sectors and different countries. That knowledge has an ethical foundation. It recognises telehealth from the perspectives of patients, service users, carers and consumers (hereafter ‘users’).

Many users of telehealth technologies and services can be vulnerable due to their social circumstances, their health status and/or challenges that arise because of mobility, dexterity, sensory or cognitive impairments. The TQG’s firm belief is, therefore, in approaches that give proper consideration to (i) the needs and choices of users; and (ii) the accessibility of technologies and services. Such approaches are explicit in the content of the ground-breaking International Code of Practice for Telehealth Services (developed by the TQG). The Code is downloadable from the TQG website at www.telehealth.global.

The context, in other words, is one where most users can and should be empowered through telehealth to exercise choices and, wherever appropriate, play a part in self-managing their health and related lifestyles. It is ethically appropriate that this should be the case. Such an approach is indicated in the TQG definition of **telehealth (as) the means by which technologies and related services concerned with health and well-being are accessed by people or provided for them irrespective of their location**. Telehealth, furthermore,

¹ As stated in the Telehealth Quality Group EEIG Foundation Document (Para 3.2).

² See Companies House (2014) ‘European Economic Interest Groupings’. The TQG is registered at Companies House, Cardiff - Registration Number GE000306.

needs to be recognised as having many domains; as relevant in the home, at work or when travelling; and as useful and important to people of all ages.³

All the partners⁴ of the TQG and its members are committed to the ethical approach indicated above. They pledge to each of the following tenets:

1. Challenging Outdated Attitudes

To encourage attitudes and build knowledge, as appropriate, among staff and within telehealth networks, that facilitates recognition of users as ‘partners’ and can challenge approaches that are overly top-down.

This means a commitment to appropriate policy and practice frameworks, together with effective training and/or guidance for staff - part of which includes confronting old prejudices and beliefs that can impact adversely on older or disabled people.

2. Fostering User Empowerment and Choice.

To encourage and maintain approaches to telehealth that, through the design and configuration of products and services, help to foster the empowerment and choices of users.

This means seeing telehealth products and services more from the user perspective and ensuring that they are, wherever appropriate, tested, trialled and evaluated with them. User acceptance and endorsement can increase the effectiveness of telehealth and the number of beneficiaries.

3. Supporting Good Governance

To maintain or promote approaches to governance in telehealth that are informed by a high level of social and environmental awareness.

This means being aware of the way in which good governance is underpinned by ethics – part of which (within the European framework for ‘responsible research and innovation’) requires the engagement with different stakeholders (including users), openness and non-discriminatory approaches.⁵

No organisation is able to join the TQG as a member without pledging commitment to the three tenets.

I (name), on behalf of
..... (organisation), as a member or prospective member
of the Telehealth Quality Group (TQG) EEIG, pledge to support the tenets of

- 1. Challenging Outdated Attitudes:** To encourage attitudes and build knowledge, as appropriate, among staff and within telehealth networks, that facilitates recognition of users as ‘partners’ and can challenge attitudes that are overly top-down.
- 2. Fostering User Empowerment and Choice:** To encourage and maintain approaches to telehealth that, through the design and configuration of products and services, help to foster the empowerment and choices of users.
- 3. Supporting Good Governance:** To maintain or promote approaches to governance in telehealth that are informed by a high level of social and environmental awareness.

Signed Date

³ Some TQG members will recognise ‘telehealth’ by other terms such as ‘digital health’. This Charter remains applicable.

⁴ Partners are TQG Board members as recognised in the Foundation Document (Para 7.3).

⁵ See, for instance, Wilford S, Fisk M and Stahl B (2016) ‘Guidelines for Responsible Research and Innovation’, Centre for Computing and Social Responsibility, De Montfort University, Leicester.