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The Future of Health

Welcome Address by Thomas Heiniger, State Councillor, Head of Health Department

Dear Lord Brennan

Dear speakers

Ladies and gentlemen

«citius, altius, fortius» – faster, higher, stronger – that's the motto of the Olympic Movement. And the Olympic Games are providing the framework for the Life Science Day at the House of Switzerland today. It is my great pleasure to welcome you here. Thank you for being here.

We are not only going to look at the Olympic motto but also at the topic «The future of health». Analogous to the Olympic motto «faster, higher, stronger» I have chosen 3 adjectives for «The future of health»: «efficient, interdisciplinary and individual».

Efficient means effective and economic. These are our requirements on medicine today and in the future. When I say effective and economic, I immediately think of Health Technology Assessment. The objective of HTA is to view medical service under the aspect of the cost/efficiency ratio. This inspection is done from various angles: economy, ethics and law.

In Switzerland, we have started to take the first concrete steps with HTA a few years ago. Based on European models: NICE in Great Britain and IQWiG in Germany. This international view is of particular importance to me in the context of the future of health. To learn from each other, to exchange know-how – that's what brings us further ahead. The European health systems vary. Each of them has their strengths and surely their weaknesses. To pick the best of each and put it all together brings us on a good road to the health of the future.

Moreover, Health Technology Assessment demonstrates interdisciplinary cooperation: Medicine meets ethics, economy and law. I am convinced that interdisciplinarity is the key to tomorrow's medicine. Health does not only require good doctors. Good health care comprises various disciplines which takes us to the second adjective: interdisciplinary.

The future of health is also characterized by the accumulation of more and more knowledge drawn from more and more disciplines. I will only pick one example today: IT. In comprehensive health care where diagnostic methods, medication and surgery are to be coordinated, dealing with all the data is a key success factor.

That's where IT comes in. Which health data are stored in which manner? How are they evaluated and made available? These are essential questions. I am convinced: Elaborated digital data processing will enable our health care to progress significantly.

Collecting and processing data means being confronted with data security immediately. An important matter: The protection of one's own data and personality. This leads me to my third adjective: individual.



I am thinking of individualized or personalized medicine. No standard treatment for all patients but a custom-made medicine for the individual. Diagnosis, preventive measures, treatments and medication – in line with the personal biological trait.

That fascinates me. And that's why I have sent my saliva to a lab in order to have my genetic code analysed. It opens the path I have described: The knowledge of the biological features makes individually tailored medicine possible. If the necessary funds are available. It's the same in medicine as it is in other aspects of life: Individual means expensive. The dress off the shelf is cheaper than the tailor-made one.

But the genetic code holds yet more possibilities than individually tailored treatment. For instance the recognition of predispositions and health risks. The principle is simple: The more individuals make their data available to research, the more diagnostically conclusive the individual analysis will become. Each single one plays a part in contributing to the collective knowledge growth. And each participant benefits from the collective in return. A win-win situation.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am aware that there are many questions to be answered around platforms like 23andme and others. Critical voices are as loud as the positive ones. There are fears as well as euphoria. The one thing that is vital now is: Educational work. We – that includes the government – shape the development of health care. That also means making these developments available, raising the awareness of new chances. And take society with us on our way.

Mind you: We are not able to take the individuals' responsibility towards themselves off their shoulder. Health is indeed a very personal matter. What each one can or wants to do for their health is mainly in their own responsibility. We can accompany, inform and open up possibilities. We can however expect the individual to recognize the value of their own health.

Value also means health is of worth and worth the costs. For it is irreplaceable. Today and in the future. For today's exchange about «The future of health» I wish you, ladies and gentlemen, much success. Take advantage of this special day in this special environment. Thank you for being here. «The most important thing is not to win but to take part».