

Health informatics — Interoperability of telehealth systems and networks —

Part 1: Introduction and definitions

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National foreword

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Summary of pages

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*Informatique de santé — Interopérabilité des systèmes et des réseaux
de télésanté —*

Partie 1: Introduction et définitions



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Foreword

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ISO/TR 16056-1 was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 215, *Health informatics*.

ISO/TR 16056 consists of the following parts, under the general title *Health informatics — Interoperability of telehealth systems and networks*:

- *Part 1: Introduction and definitions*
- *Part 2: Real-time systems*

INTRODUCTION

Delivery of health care services by means of telehealth is advancing rapidly. Telehealth enables providing these services with the use of information and telecommunications technologies. This includes a broad spectrum of capabilities including acquisition, storage, presentation, and management of patient information (represented in different digital forms such as video, audio, or data), and communication of this information between care facilities with the use of communications links.

Telehealth interactions may be carried out in three ways: **real-time**, **store-and-forward** or with the use **media streaming** methods. While real-time interactions imply that all parties directly participate in the telehealth session, store-and-forward interactions involve sending, reviewing, and returning an opinion over a period of time. Streaming is a method of delivery real-time or stored data such as audio, video, documents, still images, or other data type across networks with a reasonable amount of Quality of Services (QoS). With streaming, a receiving system can start displaying (or playing) the data before the entire content arrives.

Real-time telehealth sessions usually involve **synchronous** data transmission while store-and-forward can usually be regarded as **asynchronous**. Streaming uses time-synchronized streams of continuous media during transmission. However, data presentation uses buffering, if the receiving system receives data more quickly than required. If the data is not received quickly enough, the presentation of the data is interrupted.

Interoperability of telehealth systems and networks is critical in ensuring the telehealth technology serves well the care recipients and providers and meets their expectations. While this requirement is essential to the long-term sustainability of telehealth, interoperability is difficult to achieve. There are many reasons that make telehealth interoperability difficult, however, the following three need urgent addressing: (1) too broad definition of telehealth, (2) lack of standards specifically designed for telehealth, and (3) collaboration between the information technology and telecommunications industries.

There are multiple definitions of telehealth. The services provided by telehealth cover a broad spectrum of activities ranging from videoconferencing through exchange of health information to providing care services in emergency and complex clinical cases. From a technology perspective, the scope of these services is too broad and this makes it difficult to develop telehealth standards and products.

There is no 'official' telehealth standard. The telehealth industry uses high-level health care guidelines and technical standards developed for various technology sectors including multimedia conferencing, information technology, data communications, and security. These guidelines and standards focus on functional and operational requirements and do not address interoperability. To further complicate the problem, all of these standards as well as the telehealth needs and practices are rapidly changing.

Telehealth, more than any other recent development, bridges the boundaries between telecommunications and information technologies. The business goals and attitudes of these two industries are different. Telecommunications industry has a history of regulation, standardization, and control of the customer premises equipment. Interoperability and reliability have been the key factors to growth. The information technology industry (the desktop computing industry in particular) has achieved success through encouraging innovation, diversity, and tremendous cost-efficiency not always paying attention to interoperability aspects of the technology. The marriage of these two cultures and the integration of their respective technologies proved to be challenging.

To address the needs for interoperable telehealth systems and networks, telehealth services must be clearly defined in terms of their scope and interrelationships with other health-related services, a set of telehealth-specific standards must be developed, and subsequently implemented by the respective industries.

This two-part ISO Technical Report addresses interoperability issues in telehealth systems and networks. This document has been structured as follows:

Part 1: Introduction and Definitions. Covers an introduction to telehealth and includes the definitions of telehealth, interoperability, and related terms.

Part 2: Real-Time Systems. Defines the scope of the technical standards related to real-time applications, (including video, audio, and data conferencing), identifies gaps and overlaps in the standards, defines requirements for interoperable telehealth systems and networks, and identifies building blocks for interoperable telehealth solutions.

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This Technical Report is to be complemented by two other documents that will cover interoperability of store-and-forward and media streaming telehealth applications.

The target users of these documents are care providers and health care organizations, telehealth equipment vendors and implementers of telehealth solutions, professional organizations, and governments.