E-portfolios in health: Exploring perceptions of education and management

Background
National strategies for the implementation of information and communication technologies (ICT) have seen increasing health sector interest in using ICT tools and systems, such as e-portfolios, to monitor performance and support professional development. Superficially there appears to be two distinct functions and associated purposes for e-portfolios. Firstly, from a management -monitor performance- perspective, e-portfolios are used to create a "product" for evaluation. This product is the purposeful, and directed, accumulation of digital evidence demonstrating competency, illustrating achievement and highlighting professional activities. Secondly, from and educational -professional development- perspective, individuals use e-portfolios to engage in a "process" of self-improvement. In this process mode, individuals critically review structured digital artefacts and through reflection they make meaning of their experiences and identify areas for improvement and personal growth. These superficial perceptions of e-portfolios, product and process, can create tensions that often inhibit collaboration between educationalists and managers and educational providers and employers. To explore e-portfolio functionality in the health sector the Waikato Institute of Technology and the Waikato District Health Board facilitated the, *e-Portfolios for Health: A Hands on Symposium,* for over 80 participants. The major aims were to dispel superficial perceptions, gain a common understanding of purpose and increase collaboration between all parties.

Outline
The symposium was divided into two interwoven streams, one for presentations and the other for group discussion. The presentation stream was based on five (5) authentic case-studies of e-portfolio implementations. Presenters were asked to indicate the rationale for using an e-portfolio system, the benefits-barriers faced during the e-portfolio implementation and the potential future use of e-portfolios. The group discussion stream activities were based on participants completing the following statement "In my role as an (*educator / manager /…*) the purpose of an e-Portfolio is to (*record CPD, list educational achievement ...,*) because (*managers can monitor progress, moderators have a record of learning ...*) and this will (*allow learners to reflect, managers to evaluate ....).* As well as generating initial debate these completed statements were ranked and used as a basis for in-depth discussion on the functions and purposes of e-portfolios in the health sector.

Collation and synthesis of symposium findings
The findings of the symposium were collated around the two identified streams, presentation and group discussion.
Presentation stream
There was general agreement from presenters that
- Ultimately e-portfolios involve people and they need to be assured that any e-portfolios created are secure, protected, and portable.
- Compliance, "Tick-Box", approaches do not fully engage participants or improve an individuals practice or performance.
- There is a need to avoid "stand-alone" organisational/institutional solutions as impact can be increased and efficiencies generated by collaboration.

Group Discussion Stream
During group discussions, it became apparent the concept of e-portfolios was both multi-layered and multi-purposed.
- Participants recognised e-portfolios impacted on individuals, professional/ regulatory bodies and organisations. This means the benefits to the individual (WIIFM: what's in it for me) and the organisation / body (WIIFT: what's in it for them) need to be clearly outlined and articulated to increase acceptance.
- E-portfolios are used by individuals for both professional and personal use, by professional/ regulatory bodies to confirm competencies of individuals for (re)compliance and/or (re)certification and by organisations for recruitment, performance and planning.

Future Directions
Participants at the symposium made a series of recommendations for future activities which included
- Supporting continuing discussions from the symposium by promoting an online community of practice where e-portfolios can be discussed and case studies and exemplars published
- Promote a unified approach to the implementation of e-portfolios to all health sector organisations and institutions thus avoiding "stand-alone" solutions and reducing system implementation, maintenance and user training costs.

Keywords
e-learning**,** e-portfolios, reflective practice, performance management

How this contributes to knowledge development in the e-learning/blended learning theme:
• provides an insight into the multi-layered perceptions of e-portfolios in the health sector in New Zealand.
• offers a new way of increasing engagement and collaboration between educationalists and managers and educational providers and employing authorities
• indicates a centralised health sector portfolio system can provide an effective platform for both the monitoring of performance and the development of personalised learning plans.

References
Welsh, A. (2012) *e-Portfolios for Health: Symposium Report.* Project report Waikato District Health Board, Hamilton, New Zealand
Gray, L. (2008). *Effective Practice with e-Portfolios. Supporting 21st century learning*. JISC Innovation Group.