

Audit of the axsana AG core community

General Secretariat FDHA/Federal Office of Public Health

Key facts

The electronic patient record (EPR) is a collection of personal documents and structured data containing health information. In Switzerland, the EPR is being introduced in a decentralised manner, and involves the merger of regional implementation schemes, so-called "core communities". axsana AG is the operating company of the largest core community for EPR introduction, XAD. Coverage extends over 14 German-speaking cantons. As certification did not take place until 11 October 2021, axsana AG was unable to start operating the EPR in 2020 as planned, and is in financial difficulties due to a shortfall in receipts. The Confederation is supporting the establishment of the XAD core community with financial assistance amounting to around CHF 8.5 million.

The Federal Council instructed the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) to assess axsana AG's business activities in light of the federal financial assistance received, as well as the core community's long-term financing¹. The audit revealed that axsana AG's financial difficulties are primarily attributable to the delayed certification and that there is some uncertainty regarding its sustainable financing.

Delay in certification put axsana AG in financial difficulties

In part, axsana AG's financial difficulties stem from the fact that the delayed certification meant that the EPR could not go into operation. As a result, the fee revenue it needed from connected service providers was lacking. Moreover, when developing the EPR, additional costs were incurred which were not offset by the start-up funding from the Confederation and third parties (cantons and healthcare institutions). The measures taken by axsana AG to redress the situation and avoid possible bankruptcy, which were primarily taken with the help of third parties, are comprehensible.

All the involved organisations underestimated the scope and complexity involved in establishing the EPR, and in the accreditation and certification process. Among other things, this affected the requirements in terms of data protection and data security, which resulted in the delayed introduction of the EPR. Since November 2020, KPMG has been the sole authorised EPR certification organisation; in the same month, it certified the first core community. AxSana AG, which had gambled on a different certification organisation until the first quarter of 2021, was not certified until eleven months later.

Legacy problems are affecting axsana AG's sustainable financing

Even now that certification has taken place, axsana AG is still facing various financial challenges, which are making sustainable and successful operation difficult. The funds and measures provided to avert bankruptcy will have to be repaid over the next few years, in addition to the ongoing operating costs.

¹ The SFAO already addressed the subject of the EPR in 2019, and found considerable shortcomings even then: see "Introduction of the electronic patient record" (audit mandate 19265), available on the SFAO's website (www.sfao.admin.ch).

For the SFAO, the fundamental question is whether, over the longer term, the core community will be able to finance operation and development solely with revenues from membership fees of connected healthcare institutions and purchasable additional services. A report commissioned by the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) concluded that the long-term financing for the operation and development of the EPR infrastructure is not sufficiently secure. The Federal Council has instructed the FOPH to draw up a discussion paper on the future design of the EPR by the end of February 2022.

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