

Applied ethics and eHealth: principles, identity and RFID

Diane Whitehouse and Penny Duquenoy
The Castlegate Consultancy
and Middlesex University

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Introduction

“Access, rights, responsibilities, benefits, burdens and risks are [now] apportioned on the basis of identities of individuals ... identities are formed on the basis of personal data collected and stored and manipulated in databases. This raises ethical questions, such as obvious privacy issues [and] a host of identity related moral questions concerning (the consequences of) erroneous classifications and the limits of our capacity for self-presentation and self definition.”

<http://www.ethicsandtechnology.eu/>

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Identity

Identity and identification

- **Identity:** personal perception of self; ways of being seen by others
- **Identification:** stage in lifecycle; degree of wellbeing; disease; disease-related group; *triage*
- **Needs:** good management and correct identification of patient, clinician, institution

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eHealth

eHealth: a definition

- eHealth as conceived by the eHealth action plan (COM(356)2004, p4)

‘[eHealth] describes the application of information and communications technologies across the whole range of functions that affect the health sector.’

Examples: health information networks, electronic health records, telemedicine services, personal wearable and portable communicable systems, health portals, and many other information and communication technology-based tools assisting prevention, diagnosis, treatment, health monitoring, and lifestyle management.

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Ethics

Ethics

- Branch of moral philosophy
- Normative ethics: the practical application of ethics
- Kantian ethics and utilitarian ethics
- Ethical theories as a point of departure
- Making good choices and acting appropriately
- Using ethics as a “toolkit”

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eHealth and ethics

Health and ethics

- Tradition
- The doctor (health professional)-patient role
- Degree of bodily and psychological intimacy
- Privacy and confidentiality
- Vulnerability in ill health

eHealth and ethics

- Identity is increasingly important in relation to public sector services
- In eHealth, lots of issues relate to: privacy, confidentiality, consent - these are all issues that affect people when they are often at their most vulnerable

eHealth and ethics

- Non-maleficence
doing no harm
- Beneficence
promoting wellbeing, reducing risks,
protecting people
- Respect for autonomy
- Principle(s) of justice/equity

An adaptation from work in the field of biomedical ethics by
Beauchamp, T. & J. Childress (2001)

Codes of ethics in professional settings

- Intended to protect the public interest, uphold the standards of the particular profession, promote knowledge transfer, and require a commitment to personal integrity

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Applied principles

Applied principles in ICT

In relation to electronic health records - with the potential for compromise through technical mediation:

- Security
- Integrity
- Material quality
- Usability
- Accessibility

HEHIP (2003), *A handbook of Ethics for Health Informatics Professionals*, The British Computer Society, 2003 (endorsed by the International Medical Information Association)

Growing range of technologies used in health

- Numerous examples of technologies that pose ethical challenges
- Health services are rapidly expanding their use of ICT

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Examples and illustrations
from the group discussion

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A specific example: RFID

Radio frequency identifiers (RFID) (1)

- Specific field of radio frequency identifiers (RFID) is experiencing growing:
 - - Research possibilities
 - Practical industrial endeavours
 - Implementation and application

Radio frequency identifiers (RFID) (2)

- Identity and identification
- Privacy, affected by
 technology; circumstances; degree of
 consent
- Bio-metrics and invasiveness

Radio frequency identifiers (3)

- **Privacy and confidentiality:** unauthorised tag-reading; real-time tracking of individuals; use of data for alternative purposes; profiling/monitoring of people and behaviour; combining of personal data
- **Power and influence; justice/equity; identity; potential malfeasance:** cyber-racism; domination; shifts in perception, memory, and identity; health effects or side-effects

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Discussion and conclusions

Ethics

- matters
- is a process
- is not just theory, it is day-to-day practice
- is not just what we think, it is what we act and do
- may be full of contentions and complexities
- it is important to get informed; know both the theory and the practice; start from where you are

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Your comments and criticisms