

The Emerging Enterprise of Mobile Health Technology: Ethical Considerations in the Age of the Smartphone.

Mobile health technologies have been lauded for providing patients with innovative tools for chronic disease management and new platforms for patient-provider communication. The function of these mobile applications are diverse; some offer modest diet and exercise tips, while others claim the ability to detect irregular heartbeats and measure an individual's blood sugar level. Mobile health applications merit special attention because of their wide public consumption while little regulation exists to monitor industry claims of safety and efficacy. While critics argue federal regulation of mobile health technology would inhibit technological innovation that could improve health outcomes, some question the quality and ethicality of healthcare mobile applications that seem to offer much more than they provide. Newly introduced legislation addressing the need to regulate mobile health invites us to further consider the ethical issues surrounding commercial development of these mobile applications and the regulation of its direct-to-consumer marketing tactics.

This paper considers issues of consumer protection and individual autonomy, privacy, as well as conflicts of interest between the industry and public health. Further, the paper explores new systems of oversight that integrate features of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). This paper concludes by offering an analysis of proposed policy recommendations and their implications for both the industry and consumers.

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