

Symposiums

S4.1**Telemedicine in Chronic Disease Management****16:15 Convention Hall C****Ethical Issues in Telemedicine***Klitzman R**Psychiatry Department, Columbia University, USA*

Telemedicine promises to aid the delivery of healthcare in many ways, but also poses a series of ethical challenges. Electronic communication is revolutionising almost every aspect of modern life, including healthcare. Yet many of these advances are only recently developing, and their full extent, impact, benefits and risks remain unclear. Telemedicine can involve giving and receiving information among multiple stakeholders, including patients, family members, physicians, nurses, researchers, hospital administrators, health departments, other government agencies, insurers, and pharmaceutical companies. This information can be used for disease prevention, diagnosis, monitoring and treatment. But many questions arise concerning, for instance, what the specific benefits and risks may be of e-diagnosis and e-treatment in various fields – from telepsychiatry to telesurgery, teleradiology, and telepathology – all of which may make diagnosis and treatment more widely and cheaply available. Will or should the quality or standards of care change? Electronic health records are increasingly used to monitor and assess providers and healthcare systems, but does that detract from the quality of face-to-face provider-patient interactions and care, and if so, how much, if any, is acceptable?

Health information can also cause stigma, embarrassment or discrimination, and confidentiality is thus vital. The ease of transmission and dissemination of information means that other individuals may obtain it, posing threats. Questions arise of how much protection is needed, and if protection is not absolute in the “real world”, what minimum standard should be established; whether whole genome and whole exome sequencing data, or other sensitive information should always be placed in electronic records and treated the same as other information there; and whether patients might not disclose important information to providers because of fears that confidentiality may be violated.

Health systems face challenges of how to manage large amounts of “big data” to make best use of it, who should have access to these data, and how much to switch to telemedicine vs. face-to-face treatment. Critical questions emerge about how patients and providers view and make decisions about these issues. This presentation will explore these quandaries and ways of addressing them.