Ethical Issues of Using Information Technologies in Psychiatry: an Early Career Psychiatrists Perspective

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Today's generation relies on the Internet as their main source of information and uses it for a variety of purposes, including professional networking and education.

With regard to the nature of a therapeutic relationship, it is necessary to establish certain professional boundaries between psychiatrists and their patients. These boundaries can be compromised by a patient's request to connect online via social networks. Moreover, disclosure of patient-identifiable information can undermine the assurance of doctor-patient confidentiality. Another potential drawback is the excessive and careless disclosure of private information by the psychiatrist.

The use of emails for psychiatric clinical work can cause concerns on different levels. Firstly, confidentiality of email conversations can not always be garanteed. Secondly, patients and families trying to directly reach clinicians by finding their emails on the internet can disrupt the usual course of care.

The use of smartphone apps and gathering of data through them also creates new ethical issues. The consequence of constantly monitoring citizens by state-sized private companies is a concern, like the use of private or medical data to promote products and influence behaviours, or to determine insurance policy rates.

Due to these ethical challenges, many psychiatrists simply ignore social media and new information technologies. However, they miss valuable opportunities to engage in public health and policy discussions, establish national and international professional networks, and facilitate patients' access to information about health and services.

These questions and precautions should be inculcated as a part of the psychiatric training so that psychiatrists in the 21st century will be able to navigate themselves in the rapidly developing social media arena as cautious, yet active members.