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Totally digital: What can healthcare systems expect from the mega trend of eHealth?

Smart mobile technologies and various forms of digital solutions are very popular in all areas of everyday life. Thanks to being mobile, they are “always there” and seamlessly and unobtrusively become part of the users’ lives. The healthcare setting is no exception. In addition to the convenience that modern technologies – from mHealth to eHealth – offer, they are considered providing many potentials, from saving resources (e.g. time, personnel, costs) to improving health care.

This sounds promising. However, it has not yet been conclusively clarified if they create sustainable benefits for users as they do for the healthcare system. This is not least due to the infinite variety of possibilities, but also due to the technologies’ rapid development cycles.

The download numbers in differing app stores reveal that the most popular apps are the ones which promote health-conscious behaviour, rather belong to general health and fitness apps and probably have a preventive effect, for example by encouraging the user to get more exercises or eat healthier. Users also like solutions that in fact address medical issues and are aimed at people with acute or chronic diseases. Here, users particularly seek support in coping with the illness. Some of these solutions allow recorded data to be transmitted to the attending persons, which however requires suitable interfaces to their existing systems. All these aspects result in differing requirements for both manufacturers and users to ensure a safe and beneficial use. In order to tap the described potentials and possibilities, joint efforts of all parties involved are necessary. Also, politicians need to establish suitable conditions, without, however, creating exuberant regulations that may scotch promising approaches.

Additionally, there needs to be scientific evidence to prove the effectiveness of mHealth and eHealth solutions. This is an important prerequisite to establish digital applications as integral part of health care. If this is successful, the general trend towards digitisation, which has already made a triumphant advance into other areas of life, can also continue in health care.

