

Expanding Boundaries

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Itself a topic of constant comment, the Internet's implications for healthcare remain unclear even while its boundaries incessantly expand. The World-Wide Web and allied technologies such as telephony are clearly permanent fixtures of our world. These technologies have changed our ways of life and demonstrate further dynamic capacities to do so. They speak of what we shall be, but know not.

This realization calls for reflection on the ethical import of these new technologies for healthcare. The following articles serve as a modest introduction to the myriad ethical matters, some novel and some not, deposited at our feet by that protean Prometheus we name "technology."

In the first article, entitled "Ethics and Internet Healthcare: An Ontological Reflection," Professor Robert Makus relies on his own extensive experience as a patient and the theoretical insights of Heidegger. Professor Makus considers the import of our thinking about technology, specifically the technology embedded in the Internet as employed in healthcare. He convincingly argues that the contingent ways in which we think about technology and our relationships as constituted by technology have greater significance than technology itself.

Professor Makus's theoretically insightful article is followed by Keith Bauer's entitled "Home-Based Telemedicine: A Survey of Ethical Issues." Bauer con-

siders the ethical ramifications, particularly for familial relationships, of the home-based medicine made increasingly practicable by technology's ability to deliver medicine from a distance. Bauer, like Makus, reminds us of the importance of thinking about technology properly, as a means ordered to the meeting of human needs instead of as an "exercise in electronics."

Although medicine must not be reduced to electronics, the omnipresence and availability of electronic information does appear to be the hallmark of our age. Accordingly, in "Patient Access to Medical Information in the Computer Age: Ethical Concerns and Issues," Professor David Resnik addresses certain salient ethical issues raised by the dramatic increase in information available to patients made possible by the Internet. Such a reflection is requisite in any consideration of the Internet and medical ethics.

As Thomas K. Hazlet and Mary H. M. Bach point out, it is not surprising that online pharmaceutical sales are soaring, because at a click of the mouse medications can be ordered and delivered to your door. However, as sales increase, so do consumer concerns about the security of information provided via the Internet. In their article "The Internet, Confidentiality, and the Pharmacy.coms," Hazlet and Bach address the thorny issue of whether Internet pharmacies pose a new threat to confidentiality.

Guest Editorial

Finally, insofar as medicine aspires to be an art informed by science, it is necessary to evaluate technologies such as telephony and the Internet as they come to be employed in medicine. Of course, as Professors Tony Cornford and Ela Klecun-Dabrowska note in their article entitled "Ethical Perspectives in Evaluation of Telehealth," the very eval-

uation of telehealth requires a consideration of the different ethical concerns and resources found in the varied traditions of medicine, information systems, and information societies.

May these articles on the topic of medical ethics, the Internet, and allied technologies at once introduce and recommend the topic to readers.