

ETHICS IN DOMOTICS

Ethical practice is not 'recipe knowledge' by which simple definitive answers can be provided for complex issues and problems. It is about asking questions that shed light on the various dilemmas that can arise in considering what is appropriate for a certain person or not. In the case of technology there is a danger that complex issues of risk and safety may be seen as being amenable to instant technological solutions. A technological fix may be given priority at the expense of a thorough appraisal of the person, the context, and the reasons for behaviour that cause risk to the person or to others. If this occurs, the use of technology will almost certainly be unsuccessful.

If a particular technology is judged to be unethical under particular circumstances it is not helpful to brand it as globally unethical. In other situations, the ethical balance may be favourable to the technology. If quality of life is affected it can sometimes be unethical not to use technology.

A good example is the upcoming use of audio monitoring and camera's to monitor people with mental disabilities who are living independently. Also these people like to live in small scale group housing with an own bedroom and a common kitchen and living room, instead of a very small bedroom in an institution. Is it wise to let them alone at night without professional care worker in the same house? Who will be paying for it? Is it then acceptable to audio monitor these people at regular time intervals? In institutions it would be very cost effective to audio-

monitor residents with mental disabilities or dementia permanently. Would it be more ethical to leave this out and have a care worker checking the residents personally? But is it ethical to open the door every two hours to check if everything is o.k.? Would it not be less intrusive in the person's privacy to just watch in remotely by video camera? This would disturb the person to a lesser extent.

In considering ethical issues arising from the use of technology for people with mental disorders, questions that often help include:-Can the person with mental disability consent to this technology?-Who benefits from the technology?-Is the technology being used instead of human input?

Although many people with mental disabilities, including those with dementia, are capable of giving informed consent, this is a not a straightforward matter in all cases. In order to give consent, it is generally understood that a person should have the information required, be able to make a decision, and understand the implications of the decision.

At the end of this short paper, the statement of the author is: It is ethically not acceptable to use camera's for achieving cost efficiency in the care of people with mental disabilities. Reactions are welcome.

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