

Information Ethics in Malaysia Paperless Hospital

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the information ethics in Malaysian paperless hospital because of the variability of human behaviour due to the very dynamic nature of cyber space. Currently, Malaysia had implemented two paperless hospitals. These hospitals are using computer information system as a medium to improve their operation efficiency. But at the moment, there is no code of ethics for the healthcare professionals in handling the patient's information using the computer. They only have code of conduct as a guide. This code of conduct focuses more on patient's care. The objective of this study is to design an ethical framework towards a successful paperless hospital implementation. The data will be collected by interview and questionnaires. It is hope that the ethical framework will help to increase the efficiency of medical information system in Malaysian public paperless hospital.

KEYWORDS

Information Ethics, Ethical Framework, Paperless Hospital

1. Introduction

The use of computers in today's business decisions has both revolutionized and benefited business. Yet, misuse of computers and unethical behaviour related to computer application systems has resulted in serious losses to business and society. As never before, computer-based technology provides organizations the opportunity to have almost instantaneous access to vast amounts of critical information about customers, competitors, employees, and suppliers. Unfortunately, recent incidents involving software piracy, computer viruses, data theft, system espionage and employee monitoring have emphasized the potential for unethical behavior associated with the use of IT.

Nowadays, information is a source of power and the key to prosperity among those who access to it. Consequently, developments in information systems also involve social and political relationships, and that make ethical

considerations in how information is used are important. Electronic systems now reach into all levels of government, into the workplace, and into private lives to such an extent that even people without access to these systems are affected. New ethical and legal decisions are necessary to balance the needs and rights of everyone.

Every organization is concerns about the ethical issues among their staff especially hospitals that handle important and valuable information. Ethics among staff is important in order to make sure the successful of the organizations and to get customers' trust. Some finding shows that there is some of the healthcare professionals face an ethical problem while handling their patients' information. If these problems are not taken care of, the hospital will receive a bad reputation.

1.1 Ethics

Ethics in computing is not about computers; it is about people, even though many point an accusing finger at computers for such things as threats to privacy.

Ethics, which addresses precisely such concerns, is not about rules or about 'codes of conduct'. Both can help us, but ethics is about making free choices. Ethics is about behaviour and about ways of thinking, especially in situations where our choice can affect the dignity and well being of others. Because ethical behaviour implies free choice, it cannot be captured in rule. The standard of reference for what is ethical has to exist 'outside human definition', and therefore cannot be open to human negotiation. It is impossible to force adherence to that standard: the notion of coercion itself is foreign to it. But individually we can make a promise to abide it.

Ethics should be thinking as the system of moral principles and rules that becomes standards for professional conduct. Ethics question the basic fundamental of morals of any action to judge if it is acceptable.

Medicine always aims to promote health, prevent and cure diseases. With the advancement of technology today, there are many methods was introduced. However, some methods are rather controversial in nature i.e assisted conception. Medical ethics is applied to keep track of what is right and what is wrong in the different area of the health care. [3]

1.2 Information Ethics

Information or data protection seems to be a primary concern. There is a great need for some form of regulation concerning the collection, processing, storage and communication of medical data including images such as x-rays and eye scan. There must be strict control over this sensitive information.

The patients' information can be used for any unethical purposes such as; the insurance company will use the information to ask the patients' family to buy their insurance, and the irresponsible people will humiliate the patient among their neighbours, officemate, relatives and friends.

Despite having given their consent, patients have a right to expect that information systems are secure and will not in any way violate their privacy. Hence the method must ensure that the confidentiality of the information is always preserved, particularly when it involves the movement of information from one location to another electronically. It is ethically inappropriate to carry on providing the services if the system fails to safe guard the confidentiality of the patient information that is of a sensitive nature. Disclosure of this is a betrayal of trust.

Therefore measures must be taken to ensure that unauthorized interception can be prevented. Even if the transmitted information is intercepted, it cannot be read and therefore the information is not valid. A comprehensive legal and ethical framework is necessary for the protection of the patients' rights. [3]

In Malaysia, Ministry of Health (MOH) has Code of Conduct for medical officers and nurses.[4][5] This code of conduct guides them to be good practitioners while performing their duty. It includes a practitioner with patient manner, practitioner with outsiders' manner, and among the practitioner themselves.

Even in other countries, the hospitals also focus more on the patient's care, and only part of the code of ethics focus on the patient's information handling. For example in the Medical Ethics Manual, published by World Medical Association (WMA), state that:

"I will respect the secrets which are confided in me, even after the patient has died"

"What I may see or hear in the course of the treatment or even outside of the treatment in regard to the life of men, which on no account one must spread abroad, I will keep to myself holding such things shameful to be spoken about."

"A physician shall preserve absolute confidentiality on all he knows about his patient even after the patient has died."

"Confidential information can only be disclosed if the patient gives explicit consent or if expressly provided for in the law."

Oaths and codes vary from one country to another and even within countries, but they have many common features, including promises that physicians will consider the interests of their patients above their own, will not discriminate against patients on the basis of race, religion or other human rights grounds, will protect the confidentiality of patient information and will provide emergency care to anyone in need.

2. Malaysian Paperless Hospital

The Malaysian Government is the major provider of healthcare for its people. Other important providers contributing to the welfare of the population include the private sector and non-government organizations (NGOs).

The Malaysian Fourth Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamed, had mentioned that *“By the year 2020, Malaysia is to be a united nation with a confident Malaysian society, infused by strong moral and ethical values, living in a society that is democratic, liberal and tolerant, caring, economically just and equitable, progressive and prosperous, and in full possession of an economy that is competitive, dynamic, robust and resilient.”* [1]

The goal to achieve “Vision 2020” has been accepted as the national target for excellence by the whole nation in its endeavour for developed nation status.

In healthcare provision, as in other area of concern this vision continues to be the impetus inspiring all healthcare providers to excel.

In Seventh Malaysian Plan, it was stated that there will be 33 paperless public hospitals in Malaysia. There will be 8 hospitals using Total Hospital Information System (T.H.I.S), while the other 25 smaller hospitals will use the Hospital information System (H.I.S). But due to the economic crisis in 1998, those projects were put on hold, and are expected to be implemented during the eight Malaysian Plan. [2]

But until now at the early of nine Malaysian Plan, only two hospitals were known as paperless hospitals, while other hospital are still on hold. Some of the hospitals are not fully operated because they are still testing the systems.

3. Methodology

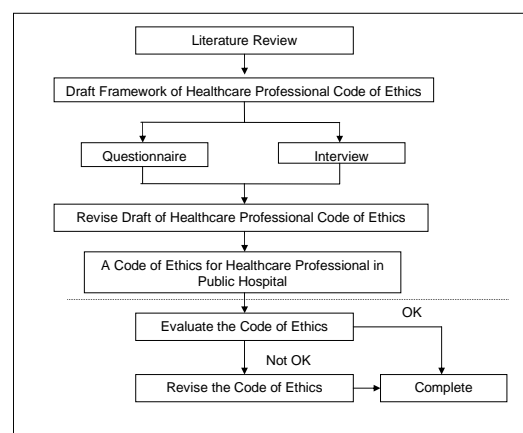


Figure 1: Research Design

Figure 1 shows how the research will be conduct. After finding a literature review related to the research, an interview was conducted to get some information about the paperless hospital in Malaysia. The researcher found that only two paperless hospitals was implemented using a Total Hospital Information System (T.H.I.S), which are Selayang Hospital and Putrajaya Hospital The whole hospital will use the computer system to do their work. This will help them to reduce the use of papers and besides that can help to save the nature.

Besides that, a set of questionnaires will be distribute to the information technology personnel, physicians, and administrative. The questionnaire will let the respondent to validate the draft framework in order to get a better and efficient code of ethics framework. The respondent was choose based on the Linstone's Multiple Perspective Model, which is to get an ethical view from the three 'lenses', technical view, organization view, and personal view.(Figure 2)

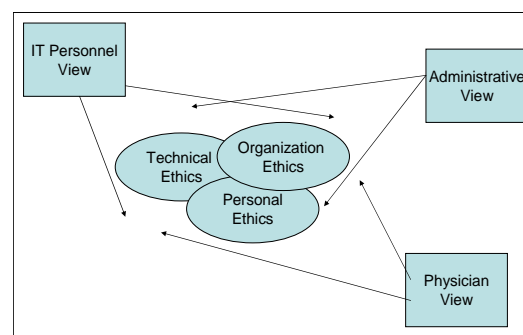


Figure 2: Multiple Perspectives Model of Medical Information Code of Ethics

The physicians are include the medical officer, medical assistant, nurses, and attendants. While the administrative will be include the staff in Record department, and the top management.

Finally, the framework will be submitted to be considered by the Malaysia Ministry of Health (MOH).

4. Ethical Framework

Figure 3 shows the suggested ethical framework of computer based information for healthcare professional.

1. Confidentiality

- 1.1 ensures that only authorized individuals have access to the patient's information system.
- 1.2 maintain confidentiality of privileged information and uses discretion in sharing information among the practitioners
- 1.3 not disclose information about a patients unless to other practitioners who involved with the patient's care.
- 1.4 preserve absolute confidentiality on all I know about patient even after the patient has died.
- 1.5 will not disseminate, or misleading information

2. Data Protection

- 2.1 process data fairly and lawfully 2.2 obtain data only for working purpose(s)
- 2.3 necessary keep and up to date the data
- 2.4 must prevent unauthorized creation, alteration, or destruction of data.
- 2.5 keep the information secure
- 2.6 releases the information only with the permission, except when release it required by law.
- 2.7 check for authenticity when 'required by law' and abide by due process on procedural guidelines.
- 2.8 consider carefully the content to be entered into the computer system

3. Computer Use

- 3.1 must have user-ID and password to access to the computer system.
- 3.2 will not use the computer system for non-official purpose (s).
- 3.3 will not write down and left in place where unauthorized persons might discover them, or near related access devices.

- 3.4 will change the password on the involved system whenever an unauthorized party has compromised the system.
- 3.5 will make sure that the system have been log out before leave the computer system.

Figure 3: Ethical Framework

5. Suggestions

In Malaysia, since they are moving towards a paperless hospital, the researcher will try to come out with framework of code of ethics for practitioner just for handling patient's information system. A Linstone's Multiple Perspective Model was used to design the code. This is because the model was useful for organizing a description to aid in understanding all points of view. [8]

The ethical framework will describes to the practitioner what is expected of them whilst performing their duty. This way the role of the practitioner is clearly put in perspective. Patients can be confident that they will receive quality care and their rights will not be violated in anyway. Without a framework, it will be difficult to determine the moral obligation of the practitioner towards the patient. The framework is to ensure that the quality of care is not compromised and hence to improve clinical effectiveness which is one of the aims of any health authority.[3]

6. Conclusion

Medical information consider confidential because it is related to the people's life. No matter who are the people, whether he is an artist, minister, or student, health information can influence their life style, and other people perceptions about them. That is why the ethical framework is very important in preventing the information.

It is hope that the ethical framework can be use to let the practitioner to act in a manner which recognizes their responsibilities toward society, to demand that the personnel are of the highest calibre, and to demand that a mechanism exists to protect society from those personnel that who do not, or cannot, live up to these responsibilities.

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