

Letters to the Editor

Health Information Counselors Help Avoid Automated Decisions in Health Care

To the Editor: I agree with Fiske and colleagues¹ that the introduction of health information counselors (HICs) is an urgent necessity if we are to ensure the efficient use of increasingly robust health care data provided by artificial intelligence (AI). Using HICs could be an excellent way to avoid automatized decisions on patient treatment.

Soon, algorithms built on big data analysis will surely be able to improve a physician's ability to prognose a patient and prescribe a concrete treatment. So, in the context of personalized medicine, in which every patient constitutes a unique

case, HICs could be more capable of integrating all data at stake and advancing an accurate prognosis.

Since machines can still make grave mistakes, the final responsibility for a health care decision should remain in human hands. But who should take on this responsibility? Without HICs, physicians may become reluctant to do so since prognosis is an extremely complex field, where human feelings may be an obstacle in making an objective, precise decision. Due to defensive medicine considerations, many physicians may feel comfortable abdicating responsibility for patient treatment decisions to a machine.

From a different perspective, patients could find themselves feeling mistreated

if they thought that AI would be making an essential decision about their future. HICs could play a key role in breaking this potentially problematic framework by supervising the functioning of AI and/or providing both patients and physicians with accurate advice on every case.

Disclosures: None reported.

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Reference

- 1 Fiske A, Buyx A, Prainsack B. Health information counselors: A new profession for the age of big data. *Acad Med.* 2019;94:37–41.

Acknowledgements:



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 788039

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