Ethical Considerations in Social Workers’ Use of Technology with and on Behalf of Older Adults

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Introduction

The digital technology revolution has changed the way we practice with, and on behalf of, older adults. It has enhanced the connecting between older adults, caregivers, providers and the community.

Internet-based technologies and mobile devices are being developed to assist older adults with everything from communication and engagement to health and wellness.
Learning Objectives

During today’s session:

• You’ll obtain useful information on how to ethically use technology to enhance services when working with older adults

• You’ll also obtain useful information on how to address the ethical challenges that technology presents.
Early Communication Methods
Today’s Electronic Technologies
How do clients benefit from the use of technology?

America’s seniors have historically been late adopters to the world of technology compared to the younger generations, however that has changed. Today, technology is used by older adults to assist with:

- Aging in place
- The ability to address a range of medical, health and functional needs
- Social connections to friends, family, and community
- Exercise
- Safety
- Cognitive function
- Active aging
What are the challenges with older adults use of technology?

• Age
  – Crystallized intelligence
  – Visual memory
  – Perceptual speed

• Education

• Web designs
  – speakers are not loud enough
  – the fonts of some apps are too small or are too large
  – The location and size of the buttons can be hard to see
What are the challenges with older adults use of technology?

• Physical challenges to using technology
  – Vision
  – Hearing
• Difficulties learning to use new technologies
• Skeptical attitudes about the benefits of technology
Technology Standards In Social Work Practice
Technology Standards

The technology standards were designed to guide social workers’ use of technology; enhance social workers’ awareness of their ethical responsibilities when using technology; and inform social workers, employers, and the public about practice standards pertaining to social workers' use of technology. The sections focus on:

1) provide information to the public;
2) design and deliver services;
3) gather, manage, store, and access information about clients; and
4) educate and supervise social workers.
NASW Code of Ethics

• Revisions that incorporate the use of technology will be presented during the 2017 Delegate Assembly.
NASW Code of Ethics Revisions

• The Task Force reviewed the Code of Ethics to determine whether changes were needed to address concerns related to the use of technology

• Standards addressed included:
  • Informed Consent (1.03)
  • Competence (1.04 and 1.05)
  • Conflict of Interest (1.06)
  • Privacy and Confidentiality (1.07)
  • Interruption of Services (1.15)
  • Client Records (3.04)
Social workers can provide services to individual clients by:

- Providing online, telephone counseling and videoconferencing
- Offering self-guided Web-based interventions
- Supporting appropriate electronic social networks
- Promoting the use of appropriate mobile apps
- Making appropriate use of e-mail and text messages.
Social Workers Make use of Technology to:

• Access, gather, and manage information about clients.
• Communicate with and on behalf of clients
• Participate in social and political action including
  – addressing compelling social justice issues, organize communities, advocating and developing social policy.
• Explore, create and develop new technologies for practice
Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice

• Laws and Licensure
  – HIPAA
  – Regulatory
  – Older American Act
  – Estate Planning
  – Medicaid, Disability, and Long-Term Care
  – Elder abuse laws
Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice

- Informed consent
  - Benefits and Risks
- Skills and knowledge
  - Competence
  - Technology
  - Cultural
- Confidentiality
  - Limits
  - Informed consent
- Boundaries
Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice

– Personal use of technology
– Social Media
  • Blogs
  • Friending
  • Solicitation
– Access to Records
  • Collaborations
  • Ability to access
– Interruption of Services
  • Emergencies
    – Duty to warn
– Social and Political Action
  • Advocacy
Implications for Social work Practice

• Become knowledgeable of the benefits of the use of technology

• Be aware of the challenges

• Develop a level of competence around the ethical implications as well as the standards of practice that relate to the use of technology

• Become inspired to explore, create, develop and use various appropriate forms of technology
Implications for Social work Practice

• Work with web designers
  – Avoid a patterned background behind text material
  – Use dark type or graphics against a light background
  – Avoid excess graphics and animation
  – Use a consistent layout in different sections of the website
  – Limit how much information is presented on each page
  – Distinctly identify all links with a specific convention, such as underlining or a unique graphic
  – Clearly identify the content that is included under each heading
  – If animation is used, select short segments to reduce download time
  – Provide a telephone number and e-mail address for users who want direct contact.

Adopted from Mead, Lamson and Rogers, 2002 and National Library of medicine 2002
Resources

- http://toolkit.techandaging.org
- http://www.aarp.org/home-family/personal-technology/info-2014/is-this-the-end-of-the-nursing-home.html
- http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/04/03/older-adults-and-technology-use