Global Public Health, Social Media and Research: Opportunities and Ethical Challenges

Social media such as blogs, wikis, discussion forums, ratings sites and online social networks are transforming the ways in which people and health professionals create, share and understand health information. We can now find, discuss and even review diagnoses, symptoms and treatments almost instantly. Dr Dan O’Connor will explore the ethical challenges that this transformation raises for health research. Drawing on examples of emerging uses of social media in health research Dr O’Connor will argue that existing research ethics frameworks may be inadequate to deal with those ethical challenges. In their place he proposes an ‘ethics of apomediation’ in which the moral concerns of power differentials are replaced with those of a horizontal peer-to-peer system.

The increasing use of social media in health research brings to the fore ethical issues that have yet not been adequately addressed by current ethics guidelines, and need to be explored further. Drawing on the discussions within WHO’s Research Ethics Review Committee (WHO ERC), Dr Abha Saxena will talk about the opportunities and challenges of using these new tools in the field of health research.

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