

Ethics, scalability, and sustainability of human support in digital health intervention: A Panel Discussion

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Context: Support from trained healthcare professionals, such as nurses, therapists, and even trained lay persons, may improve adherence and increase the effectiveness of digital health interventions (DHIs). However, the availability and sustainability of human support may not meet growing demands. Furthermore, digital health supporters may need to provide multi-faceted support ranging from critical health interventions to the emotional and technological challenges that users face, which introduces additional ethical challenges.

Proposal: This panel discussion will invite researchers, clinicians, and stakeholders to share their experiences and key learnings in developing and disseminating blended DHIs across a range of healthcare challenges. The discussion will focus on various topics surrounding the provision of human support by trained professionals in combination with DHIs, including (1) healthcare professionals' needs (2) education and training of supporters, (3) social and community level factors, and (4) ethics and safety of support provided by trained lay person. The discussion will be moderated by early career researcher, Ahmad I. Jabir, a PhD candidate with ETH Zürich exploring the affordances of AI-driven conversational agents in healthcare. Two confirmed speakers include, Prof. Tobias Kowatsch (University of Zürich) who uses MobileCoach, an open-sourced DHI platform to develop and deliver blended treatment support with healthcare professionals, and Assoc. Prof. Gemma Sharp (Monash University), who has led the development of novel digital interventions that address body image concerns and eating disorders such as KIT and JEM™. We will extend invites to leading industry player from companies such as SilverCloud and Pathmate Technologies and clinicians who will be attending the conference.

Format: The panel discussion will take the following format: (1) Introduction of the panelists (5 min per panelist); (2) Q&A from audience members based on questions submitted during and prior to the session. The panel discussion will be in-person, but we request a hybrid format option to accommodate unforeseen circumstances. The audience may submit questions in advance via the conference app, X (formerly known as Twitter), or Slido. Some pertinent questions include the types of training provided or required for trained individuals to sufficiently support users on a digital platform, provisions ongoing support for supporters to manage burnouts, methods of managing dropout and maintaining a healthy pool of supporters, and the ethics and safety of supports provided by family members or community members,

Implications: We hope to create a working group focusing on the development of a framework to create sustainable and ethical support system beyond just trained healthcare professionals.