
EDITORIAL

PROS AND CONS OF SMART PHONES IN HEALTH – HAS THE TIME COME TO LEGISLATE THE RATIONAL USE OF THESE DEVICES?

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Smart phones are now an important component of our daily life. Smart phones use at workplace brings in several challenges. In hospital settings and at teaching areas in medical colleges, improper usage results in many important risks like affecting teaching activities, privacy and security of patients as well as healthcare workers. More over smart phones also result in distractions, nuisance and affect many decision-based activities at critical times like in ward rounds, in meetings like case discussions and in examination of patients by students. A lot of time is wasted by use of social media applications at workplace, like Facebook, twitter and WhatsApp. Use of smart phones during working hours is a big source of wastage of time on part of healthcare providers. But at the same time doctors need these devices for patient management. Medical students and other support staff do not need these devices for any essential job during the working hours. There is a strong need to rationalize the use of smart phones during working hours

A smart phone is a mobile device with additional features, just as personal digital assistant devices. Many brands of smart phones like Apple® iPhone®, Android based devices like Samsung Galaxy S, HTC mobiles, BlackBerry devices, Microsoft Windows devices, and Nokia are being used in Pakistan. Smart phone applications (apps) are software programs that run only on a smartphones or other similar devices with or without internet connectivity. Apart from many social media sites, there are a lot of common apps related to health care, fitness, medical and lifestyle modification for many common diseases. Along with an increase in number and types of apps available across the globe, there is an increase in demand of smart phones in hospital settings. In order to make sure that excessive usage or rather abuse may not result in medical errors or

inefficiency, hospitals and medical institutions have to develop some guidelines and some strict policy about usage of smartphones at workplaces.

For many years it has been well known that use of smart phones causes decline in cognitive function and performance, an increase in reaction time, decreased concentration and low performance in a task which need to have a quick decision or solution¹. Use of smart phones also result in a decrease in attentiveness along with un-intentional blindness. Smartphone users are sometimes so engaged in their activity on phone that even looking around doesn't register anything or register it appropriately. It has been practically demonstrated that one is unable to handle excessive amount of information at any given time due to use of cell phones, which causes distraction from the primary task. Even using smart phones during walking can be dangerous, leading to slowing down inappropriately, incorrect changes of directions and lack of awareness about passing-by colleagues. Halamka recorded a case where a trainee in medicine forgot to stop an anticoagulation drug of an operated patient due to distraction caused by a text message received on her cell phone². A study from Australia observed that with each interruption in a medical care facility there was a 12.1% increase in failure of procedures and 12.7% increase in medical errors³. Some of negative outcomes of cellular phones also resulted in discordance in working between doctors and nurses due to an over reliance on text messages and little verbal communication⁴. Rosenfield et al demonstrated that cellular phones can result in facilitation in learning, treatment, and communication by taking interesting diagnostic pictures, recording videos of procedures, but again it is disruptive and distracting⁵. Rosenfield admitted in his study that cellular phones resulted in a compromise in patients'

privacy, confidentiality and their data security. It can be a risk to infection control and cross-contamination⁶. In some studies; it has been shown that electromagnetic radiation by smartphones result in malfunction of some patients' devices like a pacemaker or of some other medical equipment⁷.

A complete ban on smartphones at workplace is not a good option as it can result in in-attention, social detachment and an intentional non-adherence with work of this gadgets addicted generation. A policy on smartphone usage at hospitals or other health care related setting which can address the issues can help to alleviate the anticipated future risks. Health care organizations must take actions to limit unauthorized or unlawful cell phones to access their network and

information. Personal message or any kind of interruption via smartphone must be avoided. Each health care facility must analyze the need of their employees about phone usage and modes of required communications and to set some necessary guidelines.

In conclusion, from all of the above discussion and in reference to above studies, it is evident that smartphones and other such devices, although form an integral part of our today's life, are compromising data security, privacy of patients, effecting patient quality care, efficiency of healthcare professionals and are a continuous sources of distraction. There must be some restrictions on use of smart phones in teaching areas of medical colleges and in hospital settings and there is need of developing guidelines and awareness about this scorching issue.

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