

Enhancing Critical Awareness of Health Information from Wearable Devices

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With the advent of wearable health and fitness tracking devices, the way health care will be delivered will change because of the opportunity for people and providers to more easily track and respond to even small changes in a person's health status. Wearable devices perceive and record health information about users continuously and discreetly. One question is whether there is a distinction between information that may be less sensitive, such as how many steps someone walks, and more sensitive medical information, such as someone's blood sugar or heart rate. The awareness of people about the distinction between non-sensitive versus sensitive information has to be analyzed, which will address how comfortable people are in sharing this information when they know the risks involved. Unfortunately, health information is not considered protected health information unless it is shared with doctors, hospitals or any third-party vendors (Business Associates) of these entities. These devices are not covered under the Health Care Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and thus there can be little expectation of privacy or security as provided for under this legislation. Although not required, at least one major vendor for wearable devices has indicated that its devices are compliant with HIPAA, which results in questions about why this vendor chose to comply with HIPAA and why other vendors are not yet following suit. My research explores the perception of people with respect to how the information gathered from wearable and fitness tracking devices is used and shared by vendors and third parties and what options might need to be provided to users by vendors or mandated by law to increase the security and privacy of this information. As part of my research, I have reviewed the terms of service and other information for a selected number of devices.

References

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