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Actively design framework conditions for digital healthcare - the protection of patient data is non-negotiable!©

wk1003mike / shutterstock.comThe digital transformation has now also reached healthcare. Health apps, electronic patient files, telemedical applications and digital medical communication in real time have long been technically available and are being used. However, this increases the risks for safe and confidential handling of patient data. Events such as the hacker attack on the data of politicians and celebrities that became known at the beginning of January 2019 or reports of an increase in trading in health data on the so-called dark web are evidence of this.

The digitization of the healthcare system will continue despite these diverse threats. Against this background, society as a whole, but above all politicians and those involved in self-government in the health care system, have a responsibility to actively shape the framework conditions for digitized health care and, in particular, to take timely, suitable and effective precautions for adequate protection of patient data in the digitized age hold true. A unilateral relaxation or deletion of data protection standards would be the wrong approach.

The opportunities associated with the digitization of the healthcare system, such as better healthcare for the population or a reduction in healthcare costs, are undisputed. However, this also applies to the associated risks.

The digital transformation in medicine is progressing rapidly. Technological developments that are now available, which enable better treatments and bring many advantages from the patient's point of view, are becoming established.

In contrast, the effective protection of patient data is not always in view. On the contrary: when digital technologies are used in the healthcare sector, a number of stakeholders are often not sufficiently aware of the specific threats to patient data and how to counteract them. Events such as the hacker attack on the data of public figures, which became public knowledge at the beginning of January 2019, as well as current press reports, according to which hacker attacks on patient data and their trading on the so-called dark web are increasing significantly, demonstrate the need for action in this context .

"Current events show that we as a society as a whole are required to ensure confidential and secure healthcare even in the digital age." explains Prof. Dr. Dieter Kugelmann, State Commissioner for Data Protection and Freedom of Information in Rhineland-Palatinate. "Just making use of the advantages of digitization without averting the risks, which often affect the

individual patient personally, would not only be legally inadmissible, but in my view also ethically questionable. I therefore fundamentally oppose proposals from the political sphere to relax data protection for patients in order to promote digital developments in the healthcare sector. Rather, politicians should actively shape the framework conditions for data protection-compliant digital healthcare together with the actors of self-government and not leave it to international companies to set uncontrolled standards here that do not do justice to patient protection or data protection," says Kugelmann.

At the turn of the year, Prof. Dr. Kugelmann took over the chairmanship of the data protection conference (DSK), the body of the independent German data protection supervisory authorities of the federal and state governments, for one year.

Strengthening data protection in the healthcare sector is one of his top priorities.

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