February 14, 2020

The Editorial Team,

2020 Yearbook of Medical Informatics

Re: Revision of the manuscript reference number: YB20\_WG\_TLM

Dear Editors,

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to revise our YB Paper on ethics in telehealth. We would like to thank the reviewers for their comments and suggestions. We have taken all of their comments and suggestions on board and used them to revise our article. Below we highlight and indicate our responses to their comments.

First of all, taking their comments into consideration, we have made significant (“major”) revisions to our article. We have also revised the readability and formatting of the text.

Second, following the recommendation of Reviewer 2 (“I would completely omit the text analysis” … “reframe the rest as an opinion paper from a group of telehealth field actors”), we have removed the text analysis component and reframed the text as an opinion paper that integrates perspectives of telehealth field actors with text from selected ethical guidelines. Having done that, may we point out that computational text analysis can provide vital insights into understanding positions of fields such as telehealth and telemedicine treating text as data. As Gentzkow et.al. (2019) have observed, that “For social scientists, the information encoded in text is a rich complement to the more structured kinds of data traditionally used in research”(1). However, we acknowledge that we simply did not have time to do a sufficient job on that approach for this paper and we intend to present such synthesis in a future separate publication.

Finally, in the rest of this letter, we have itemized our responses in our revised manuscript where we have responded to the specific comments by the reviewers, in order of Reviewer 1 first and then Reviewer 2. The verbatim comments of the reviewers are within quote marks and our responses to those comments are in the form of text bulleted lists.

**Our responses to the remarks of Reviewer 1:**

COMMENT “The goal of the computational text modelling is still difficult to understand”

RESPONSE - We have removed the section on computational text modelling

COMMENT “The readability of the text could be improved:

* A figure which summarizes the used methodology should help the reader to get an overview of the work performed”
* “The text could be better formatted: for example, different levels of title could be introduced in the results part in order to better organize the ideas.”
* “Figure2 is not clear when printed in white and black

RESPONSE

* We have revised our methodology to include only a synthesis of the insights from telehealth practitioners and descriptive information from guidelines. Hence we have not included a separate figure to reduce redundancy of information.
* We have included different levels of titles depending on the content to follow throughout the manuscript. In particular in the Results section, we have included section heading for each of the questions. All other headers are as per the instructions to the authors in the journal.
* We have removed Figure 2

Our responses to Reviewer 2

COMMENT - “Although the paper contains interesting and useful insights, the weak methodological framing lessens its reach**. I would completely omit the text analysis**, which is uninformative at best, and reframe the rest as an opinion paper from a group of telehealth field actors. Text analysis was limited to word counts and the results have unclear meaning for me”

We have omitted the text analysis**.**

COMMENT “The introduction is long and not clearly structured. Where do the 4 addressed points come from? What is their relation with the 6 questions?”

RESPONSE - We have completely rewritten the introduction section and removed redundant information. We also moved the “four questions” to the “Methods” section and have added text describing their origin.

COMMENT “A definition of ethics and a short discussion on whether telehealth ethics differs from the face-to-face care ethics, why and how, would have been a good introduction.”

RESPONSE - We have addressed this concern in the third and fourth paragraphs of the introduction section. In the third paragraph, we have provided a brief introduction to medical/health care ethics and in the fourth paragraph we have linked healthcare ethics with relevant ethical frameworks for telehealth.

COMMENT - “The introduction is long and not clearly structured. Where do the 4 addressed points come from? What is their relation with the 6 questions?

RESPONSE - We have significantly revised the introduction section so it is shorter and more concise. We also discuss the four questions or considerations in the form of questions. Their origin and development have been described in detail in the Methods section.

COMMENT “At the end of the discussion, the authors state that guidelines are “theory driven framing of ethics of telehealth practice”. Is this generally true? How were the three specific guidelines developed?”

RESPONSE - We have removed the sweeping statement that theory driven framing of ethics of telehealth practice in response for two reasons: (1) the reviewer’s rhetorical question, “Is this generally true” was beyond the scope of our study and also, because (2) we did not have evidence on the basis of our analysis to make a statement as we used guidelines and matched with practitioner’s experience, so in this paper, we aimed at practice based evidence rather than framing an evidence based practice.

COMMENT - “Who are these specialists (Qualification in telehealth? Experience in telehealth? Qualification in ethics? Experience in ethics? Professional status? Cultural, political, personal biases? … These specialists “deliberated” a number of questions, but how? By consensus? Brain storming? Focus group?... Were the six questions all of those brought to deliberation? Or a selection from a broader set of questions?”

RESPOSNE – The specialists are members of the IMIA Telehealth Working Group. We have revised the description of them (we refer to them as practitioners throughout the paper) in the first paragraph in the “Methods” section as follows:

“*The IMIA Telehealth Working Group constitutes over 60 members from across the globe working in the telehealth arena as entrepreneurs, promoters, academics as well as practitioners. During the telehealth working group meeting at Medinfo 2019, a proposal was made to develop set of guidelines on the use of telehealth for practitioners in a bid to answer some general concerns. The WG members were particularly interested in comparing existing ethics guidelines with the experiences of practitioners using telehealth*.”

COMMENT- - “Text analysis: The authors used text analysis to prevent “the risk of bias due to subjective assessment when we combine field experiences with analysis of documentation on policy positions.” This begs three questions:”

RESPONSE - We have removed the text analysis component completely in the revised paper as both reviewers had concerns about it.

COMMENT - “ The title of the paper “Ethics in telehealth: comparison between guidelines and field experience – the case for learning healthcare” does not relate to its content: there is no proper comparison between guidelines and field experience and even if there were, it would not define a learning health system. A learning health system is defined by the continuous analysis of daily care processes and results to generate knowledge that is used to incrementally improve processes and results.”

RESPOSNE – We appreciate that comment and acknowledge that the title was not a good fit for our initial submission. Our revised paper now does a much better job of reflecting the title. We have expanded the introduction to introduce the concept of a learning health system. We then go back to the LHS concept in the discussion to suggest that it can address the unmet need that exists to bridge the gap between issues addressed by ethical frameworks and ethical issues that telehealth practitioners face in their everyday professional lives (“practice based evidence”). We propose to use the “concepts” of a learning health system to negotiate these two worlds.

We hope the revisions we made has met the requirement for publishing that the reviewers recommended. We look forward to the publication and dissemination of our work.

Kind Regards,

Arindam Basu,

Corresponding author, on behalf of the Telehealth Working Group

References

1. Gentzkow M, Kelly B, Taddy M. Text as Data. J Econ Lit [Internet]. 2019 Sep 1 [cited 2020 Feb 2];57(3):535–74. Available from: https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/10.1257/jel.20181020