Ethically Integrating Robots to Assist Elders and Patients with Dementia

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Abstract : The emerging trend of integrating robots into elderly care, particularly for assisting patients with dementia, holds the potential to greatly transform the sector. Assisted living facilities, which house a significant number of elderly individuals and dementia patients, constantly strive to engage their residents in stimulating activities. However, due to staffing shortages, they often rely on volunteers to introduce new activities. Despite the availability of social interaction, these residents, frequently overlooked in society, are in desperate need of additional support. Robots designed for elder care are categorized based on their design and functionality. These categories include companion robots, telepresence robots, health monitoring robots, and rehab robots. However, the integration of such robots raises significant ethical concerns, notably regarding privacy, autonomy, and the risk of dehumanization. Privacy issues arise as these robots may need to continually monitor patient activities. There is also a risk of patients becoming overly dependent on these robots, potentially undermining their autonomy. Furthermore, the replacement of human touch with robotic interaction may lead to the dehumanization of care. This paper delves into the ethical considerations of incorporating robotic assistance in eldercare. It proposes a series of guidelines and strategies to ensure the ethical deployment of these robots. These guidelines suggest involving patients in the design and development process of the robots and emphasize the critical need for human oversight to respect the dignity and rights of the elderly and dementia patients. The paper also recommends implementing robust privacy measures, including secure data transmission and data anonymization. In conclusion, this paper offers a thorough examination of the ethical implications of using robotic assistance in elder care. It provides a strategic roadmap to ensure this technology is utilized ethically, thereby maximizing its potential benefits and minimizing any potential harm.

Keywords : human-robot interaction, robots for eldercare, ethics, health, dementia