

Letter to the Editor: WhatsApp in neurosurgery

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Sir,

We read, with great interest, the letter from Graziano et al. [1] entitled “WhatsApp in neurosurgery: the best practice is in our hands” as well as its accompanying editorial comments by Prof. Schaller [2]. Frequently, a balance needs to be struck between the potential benefits of a new technology (appropriate/timely decision-making and enhanced communication) that may potentially improve patient safety and concerns regarding data security and information governance.

As is alluded to in the editorial, the practical virtues of such mass communication platforms will be evident to most neurosurgeons; doubtlessly, many Departments will already employ such systems in their regular practice.

Where things become less clear is where data security is concerned. All too often, innovative technology is forced to prove itself against information governance standards, standards to which previous technologies are not held accountable. It is assumed that previous methods of communication and documentation are adequately secure when the reality is that this assertion is based upon nothing more than the fact that they constitute the status quo.

Who hasn't walked onto a ward and been able to pick up a patient's clinical notes folder without being

questioned by any of the ward staff or overheard a phone call where clinical information is being discussed, or even colleagues discussing cases in a lift or coffee shop? We would wager that these situations are far more common than are instances of being accidentally sent the wrong information on WhatsApp or reading something confidential on someone else's phone screen.

To state therefore that the “current young generation” underestimates the repercussions of privacy loss [2] would seem unfair. It could be argued that we, the neurosurgeons of the future, are using methods of communication that have been subject to more scrutiny and data protection processes than ever before, methods that use encrypted data and devices that are protected with fingerprint scanners or passcodes. If anything, it is our forefathers who have been guilty of careless communication; perhaps previous technologies should have been subject to more debate in the scientific literature prior to becoming commonplace!

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interests The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

References

1. Graziano F, Maugeri R, Giugno A, Iacopino DG (2016) WhatsApp in neurosurgery: the best practice is in our hands. *Acta Neurochir* 158:2173–2174
2. Schaller K (2016) Editorial re: WhatsApp in neurosurgery: the best practice is in our hands. *Acta Neurochir* 158:2175

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