

Global Approaches to Human Technology Services

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swsd

The Joint World Conference on Social Work, Education, and Social Development is a biyearly conference which brings together social welfare practitioners in theme of improving global human rights. The 2016 conference was hosted in Seoul, South Korea from June 27 to June 30, with the conference theme “Promoting the Dignity and Worth of People”.

information science + potential apps

My primary area of interest is the application of technology to social work. I believe that social work is in a unique position to create, and shape, the future of human service-oriented technology. A number of panels at this year's SWSD presented a future in which technology is utilized to better social welfare services and solve problems we wrestle with today. As a dual degree Information Science/Social Work student, I draw inspiration from the four examples presented here, and hope to help further both fields in my professional practice.

philip gillingham – new zealand

New Zealand's Child Protection Services have been turning to big data analytics to transform its welfare system. The Predictive Risk Model looks from historical predictors of maltreatment - namely, poverty - and identifies children who may be at risk. The PRM offers the potential to help children before they are hurt, and to offer families in risk preventative services.

However, at this time PRM has very low predictive ability. Historical data comes from “substantiated cases”, and does not take into account children whose maltreatment was never reported. Furthermore, by focusing mainly on poverty as the primary covariate for maltreatment, the tool ultimately ends up identifying families in poverty - valuable data, but not the aim of the model. PRM is possible with better data and more nuanced indicators, but at this time cannot be the primary way of determining maltreatment in children.

eunyoung lee – canada

Dementia caregivers often have low support and high stress. While many hospitals offer support groups, it can be difficult for primary caregivers to find the time or transportation to attend. Technology-based support groups often offer solutions for caregivers who cannot attend in-person meetings. They cost much less than in-person groups to run, and have much greater flexibility in terms of time and location of attendance. They have a positive impact on reducing stress among caregivers. There are still problems associated with technology-based support groups, including attrition and information literacy among elderly caregivers. However, success rates seem to indicate that this model is a useful alternative to in-person therapy groups. Further research is needed to see if they can be replicated in other group-based therapies.

jenny simpson – united kingdom

Increasingly, clients are asking social workers to connect with them in ways which stretch the boundaries of the traditional client-worker relationship. As smartphones and social media supplant traditional methods of communication, clients feel as though telephone calls and letters make their workers seem distant and cold. They often express that they feel closer to the front desk worker at an agency than their actual worker.

Moving to smartphone-based communication changes the nature of the client-worker relationship, making it much more immediate and personal. Moving from “the static to the virtual” requires that we completely rethink our ethical boundaries and contact with clients. The question is, if clients feel as though they cannot organically connect with workers without these tools, how can we stretch to meet their needs and maintain our professional identities?

lap man wan – hong kong

Social workers are tackling drug problems in Hong Kong youth by going to where their client are - the internet. Youth now take drugs in private homes rather than on the street, making them much less accessible to workers. Furthermore, both they and their parents are not willing to seek formal help and therapy until the problem is severe.

A group of social workers created an app meant to target youth in private spaces. The app lets them seek out help without having to enter an agency or talk face-to-face with a worker. Acting as a ‘kiosk’, students can see symptoms of drug addiction and effects of drug abuse, find local drug therapists, take self-administered risk assessments, and learn about helpful drug prevention activities.

The majority of workers surveyed said that the app would prove helpful in providing youth with information about risks and treatments. However, few data have been collected on how youth interact with the app - this must be determined before its effectiveness can be established.