HEALTHY E-HEALTH? THINK 'ENVIRONMENTAL E-HEALTH'!

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AUTHORS
Scott, Richard E.
Saunders, Chad
Palacios, Mone
Duyen Thi Kim Nguyen
Ali, Sajid

ABSTRACT

The Environmental e-Health Research and Training Program has completed its scoping study to understand the breadth of a new field of research: Environmental e-Health. Nearly every aspect of modern life is associated, directly or indirectly, with application of technology, from a cup of coffee, through transportation to and from work, to appliances in the home and industrial activities. In recent decades the rapidly increasing application of information and communications technologies (ICT) has added to the cacophony of technological 'noise' around us. Research has shown that technology use, including ICTs, has impact upon the environment. Studying environmental impact in such a complex global setting is daunting. e-Health is now being used as a convenient microcosm of ICT application within which to study these impacts, and is particularly poignant given that e-Health's environmental harms conflict with its noble goals of 'doing no harm'. The study has identified impacts, both benefits and harms in all three life-cycle phases for e-Health: up-stream (materials extraction, manufacturing, packaging, distribution), mid-stream (use period), and downstream (end-of-life processes - disposal, recycling). In addition the literature shows that a holistic 'Life Cycle Assessment' approach is essential to understand the complexity of the setting, and determine the true balance between total harms and total benefits, and for whom.

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