

Chapter 9

Human–Data Interaction in Healthcare

Federico Cabitza

Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca, Italy

Angela Locoro

Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca, Italy

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, we focus on an emerging strand of IT-oriented research, namely Human-Data Interaction (HDI) and on how this can be applied to healthcare. HDI regards both how humans create and use data by means of interactive systems, which can both assist and constrain them and the operational level of data work, which is both work on data and by data. Healthcare is a challenging arena where to test the potential of HDI towards a new, user-centered perspective on how to support and assess “data work”. This is especially true in current times where data are becoming increasingly big and many tools are available for the lay people, including doctors and nurses, to interact with health-related data. This chapter is a contribution in the direction of considering health-related data through the lens of HDI, and of framing data visualization tools in this strand of research. The intended aim is to let the subtler peculiarities among different kind of data and of their use emerge and be addressed adequately. Our point is that doing so can promote the design of more usable tools that can support data work from a user-centered and data quality perspective and the evidence-based validation of these tools.

INTRODUCTION

Twenty-five years ago, medical informatics was defined as “dealing with the storage, retrieval and optimal use of biomedical data” (Shortliffe et al. 1990). At that time, little emphasis was put on the practices of data production, that is on how medical practice, and single stories of illness, care and recovery are represented, accounted and “datafied” in some valid and reliable manner. However, these practices, which include policies, rules, habits, conventions, tools and techniques, have always been intertwined with and affected by the available ITs, as well as by the expectations of the stakeholders on how to make sense and use of health-related data. Different perspectives on these expectations, and on what valuable health

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data are, lead to manifest chasms between primary use and other uses of health information, as often discussed in the specialist literature (Fitzpatrick and Ellingsen, 2013). To try to cross these chasms, we need to create the suitable language to describe the differences and give some operational definitions.

We distinguish between three different macro-types of data and the related processes in which these data are either produced, processed or consumed: namely, primary data, which come from a broad range of sources and are produced within a caring process to make its unfolding seamless and smooth (Berg, 1999); secondary data that are derived from the primary data for purposes different than care, like accounting and medical billing (Abdelhak, Grostick, & Hanken, 2012); and tertiary data, that are produced from the secondary data for any unanticipated need of the potential consumers of health services (see Figure 1).

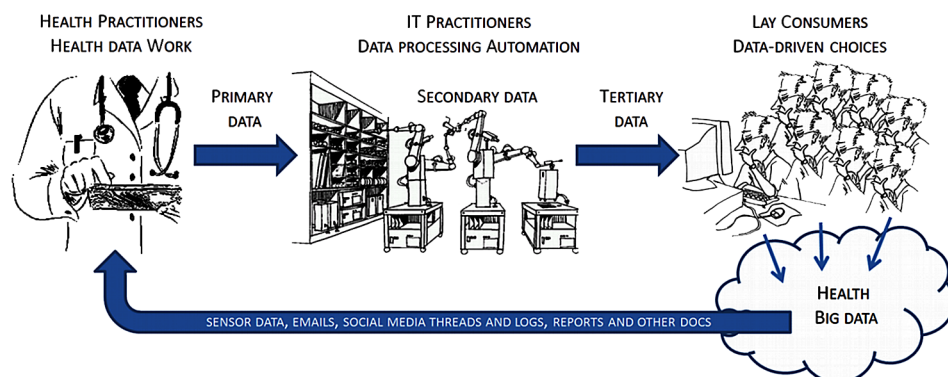
To illustrate this tripartition, an analogy from the agriculture domain can be drawn (Locoro, 2016): primary data are like the produce of the land, which farmers grow for themselves as well as the external market. Secondary data are the product of a transformation of these primary data, like the one performed in food industry where vegetables are cleansed and chopped. Tertiary data are further transformed from secondary data to make them more easily consumable, that is suitable for and conveyed to a broader population of consumers in terms of information services, like fresh-cut vegetable products can be seen as the service to have vegetables already ready-to-eat.

The definitions mentioned above shed light on the relationship between data and their uses, which cannot be overstated. The tripartition that we propose reflects the different uses and practices in which data are produced and consumed and it calls for a specific area of research focusing on how to support people in interacting with their data of concern and in gaining insight from them: Human-Data Interaction (HDI).

BACKGROUND

As rightly noted by Hornung et al. (2015), the expression HDI is neither specific nor new. On the one hand, humans have always interacted with data, that is they have inscribed, read and communicated data in terms of simple marks, more complex symbols and any kind of meaningful signs¹. On the other hand, this interaction has predominantly been mono-directional until interactive systems have allowed users to

Figure 1. The three kinds of data and ambits proposed for HDI in healthcare



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