

## Artificial agents, good care, and modernity

Technology has always been used in health care. But what about robots and other automation technology? What about artificial agents: technological entities that act in a health care environment? Should they be allowed to take over care tasks? Is it acceptable to replace human nurses with artificial nurses? Should surgery be automated? Can an expert system be trusted to make decisions about life and death? Can elderly people be left at their homes in the hands of a robot? The introduction of artificial agents in health care raises many ethical questions. When is it ethically acceptable to use artificial agents in health care?

This article articulates some criteria for good care such as human contact and emotions. Then it discusses whether machines as artificial agents that take over care tasks meet these criteria. Particular attention is paid to intuitions about the meaning of 'care', 'agency', and 'taking over', but also to the care process as a labour process in a modern organizational and financial-economic context. It is argued that while there is in principle no objection to using machines in medicine and health care, the idea of them functioning and appearing as 'artificial agents' is problematic if these agents appear as replacing humans. Moreover, the question attends us to problems in human care which were already present before visions of machine care entered the stage. First, artificial agents do not meet the criteria of good care. For instance, they cannot provide human contact and human relations, and they do not have emotions. Second, current health care is organized as a modern practice, and this raises its own problems. Are human care givers and care receivers becoming more like cogs in a care machine? Are they becoming more like machines? What is the modern attitude towards care and vulnerability? It is recommended that the discussion about care machines be connected to a broader discussion about the impact of technology on human relations in the context of modernity.

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