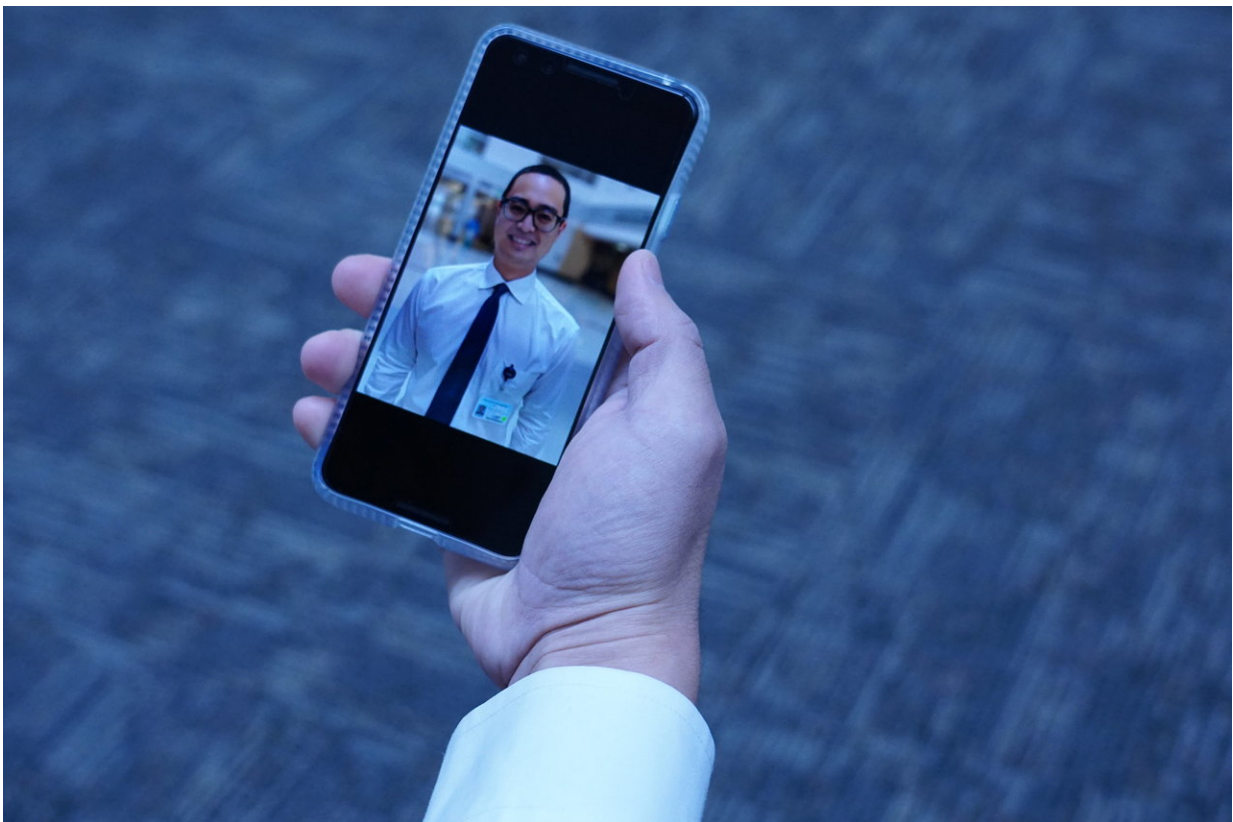


Retail outlets using telehealth pose significant privacy, policy concerns for health care

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UC Davis Health telehealth scholar Keisuke Nagawa, M.D., believes retail outlets using telehealth have unique advantages and opportunities for delivering convenient care to consumers, but it is important to monitor developments and consolidations in the health care market to ensure policies are well-designed, relevant and anticipate future applications of telehealth. Credit: UC Davis Health

A significant shift in the health care market is well underway, with various insurers, medical groups, vendors and supply chains pursuing acquisitions and mergers to expand their services, and retail outlets, from Walmart and Amazon to Rite-Aid and Albertsons, delivering health care services, including telehealth.

But do current policies adequately protect patient privacy and anticipate the capabilities of artificial intelligence and other rapidly advancing technologies? And do retailers who are rapidly expanding into traditional [health](#) care markets have significant advantages in terms of access to data over current health care organizations?

Telehealth leaders at UC Davis School of Medicine and Harvard Medical School say more needs to be done and that HIPAA, net neutrality and other policies need to be re-evaluated and updated to offer the appropriate guidance.

The researchers explore these and other [policy](#) issues in a study published in the December issue of *Health Affairs*.

"Retail outlets using telehealth have unique advantages and opportunities for delivering convenient care to consumers," said Keisuke (pronounced kes-kay) Nakagawa, a postdoctoral scholar in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at UC Davis Health and first author of the study. "But it is important to monitor developments and consolidations in the [health care market](#) to ensure our policies are well-designed, relevant and anticipate future applications of telehealth."

While Nakagawa is in support of innovative technologies in health care, a new world is emerging with smartphones, wireless internet and smart-home devices improving access, and collecting and storing unique data, from video and audio to text and biological measurements.

With the majority of telehealth consultations occurring in the home, sessions offered through smart home devices could create a channel where both consumer and health care data flow seamlessly through one device back to a commercial retailer.

Peter Yellowlees, professor of psychiatry and senior author on the study, raises concerns about the lack of policies to guide the health care industry and the general public about the potential convergence of personal health information (PHI) with non-PHI data.

"Retail outlets have access to a wealth of consumer data, and health care organizations have access to medical data," Yellowlees said. "While some convergence is already happening through data brokers selling consumer data to health care organizations, the precision, granularity and flexibility to analyze the data could be much more significant when retail organizations have access to both health care and retail-data sources directly."

Provided by UC Davis

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