



# Oberseminar

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Florian Steger  
Wintersemester 2022/23

**Montags von 13:00 – 14:30 Uhr**

**Institut für Geschichte, Theorie und Ethik der Medizin | Seminarraum  
Parkstraße 11, 89073 Ulm**

**Montag, 30.01.2023  
13:00-14:30 Uhr  
Michal Wieczorek  
(Irland)**

## **mHealth, Justice, and Democracy: The Ethical and Political Implications of Self-Monitoring Technologies in Healthcare**

In this talk, I discuss the ethical and political implications of self-monitoring technologies used in healthcare and propose a governance scheme for these technologies that would bring their functioning in line with the ideals of justice and democracy.

In recent years, many public and private healthcare institutions started relying on a range of apps and devices that facilitate patient self-monitoring of health and physical fitness. Basic smartphone apps can help users keep track of their bodily patterns and health data, while also sending relevant information to interested third parties such as healthcare professionals, family members, insurers, patient support groups and others. Specialised apps and devices also allow for detailed monitoring of specific symptoms, such as blood glucose levels, heart rate, blood pressure or even mood.

These developments have led many to claim that such mHealth technologies will contribute to public health goals and democratise healthcare by reducing overall costs of health provision, empowering patients to assume greater control over their health, and increasing access to healthcare. However, I argue that some healthist assumptions underlying mHealth mean that the technology in reality runs counter to these democratic promises. It does so by framing health management as a primarily individualistic, achievement-oriented effort and by placing greater burdens on patients, thus exacerbating health injustices. Moreover, the commodification of health management and health data raises concerns about socioeconomic justice, while the untransparent nature of data collection and management leads to epistemic inequalities that are particularly problematic in the context of patient empowerment and engagement. Finally, the introduction of privately owned and privately controlled devices into public healthcare systems is worrying due to the increased influence of publicly unaccountable companies and the extension of their reach over socially vital infrastructure. Overall, I argue that the use of commercial mHealth devices has negative implications for justice and, despite hopeful claims found in media, marketing materials and scholarly literature, renders healthcare less democratic (in terms of governance and public participation).

I propose several interventions into data governance and business models underlying mHealth technologies that would be more in line with public interests and promote the ideals of justice and democracy. I argue that while publicly owned self-monitoring platforms would be desirable, we should consider platform and data cooperatives as the right way forward. Due to their deliberative, participatory and decentralised features, platform and data cooperatives recognise and promote the interests of varied parties, are accountable to the public, and can ensure a balance between public and private health objectives, economic viability and patient rights.

**Gäste sind  
herzlich willkommen!**