

IS TECHNOLOGY GOOD FOR YOUR HEALTH?

FROM THE DEAN



Dean Stephen M. Shortell

Technology can be transformative. Innovative medical devices, the latest pharmaceuticals, and advances in surgical techniques can save and improve lives.

Electronic medical records can decrease medical and prescription errors while increasing patients' ability to manage their own health. Information technology can connect communities, deliver health care to remote areas, and allow health professionals to exchange knowledge and ideas.

Oftentimes we assume that every technological advance is positive and useful. We want the latest and greatest—especially when we are sick or in need of medical

care. But simply using technology because it's available can end up costing our society. It's important to take a step back and evaluate the efficacy of technological advancements. Are they safe? Are they really helping? Are they cost effective? We need to ensure that when it comes to technology, we are making healthy choices for the right reasons.

This issue highlights the work being done by the School's faculty members, alumni,

and students to examine our technological choices at home and abroad. You can read about our new Berkeley Center for Health Technology (BCHT), led by Professor James Robinson and funded by a generous start-up grant from Genentech. The center will provide a home for broad research into reducing expenditures while incentivizing innovation in the medical technology arena. It will complement health reform initiatives to create a National Center for Comparative Effectiveness. This is a vital area, because while medical technologies are developing quickly, the practitioners who utilize the results need help to keep pace with development. BCHT can help make decisions as to which products are most cost-effective and helpful for patients. BCHT will disseminate its findings to biotech and medical device companies, health insurers, major employers, physicians, policy makers, and the public at large.

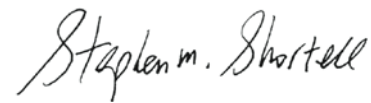
Although artificial limbs and the latest drugs might be the first examples one

thinks of, health technology is a broad field. Exciting advancements are being made in the field of telehealth, which brings medical resources to remote and underserved regions. In this area we spotlight our distinguished alumna Sandra Shewry, M.S.W., M.P.H. '81, who recently left her position as director of California's Department of Health Services to lead the new California Center for Connected Health, which focuses on telehealth in our state. Our "Student Spotlight" features Terrence Lo, Dr.P.H. '09, who is evaluating the efficacy of telemedicine in rural India, under the guidance of adjunct professor Julia Walsh.

Although health and medicine may not be the first topics that come to mind when you think of the Internet, its power as a resource and a communication tool is being increasingly harnessed to build healthier communities. An example of this effort is the research of clinical professor Deryk Van Brunt, Dr.P.H. '97, which led to the creation

of a web-based information system, the Healthy Communities Network. This Internet tool is already producing results in pilot communities, including Marin and San Francisco Counties.

Health information technology is a critical part of President Obama's strategy to reform our health care system, and nearly \$20 billion of his recent stimulus package is being directed towards health IT. This is an exciting time in the area of health technology, and we look forward to sharing our work with you in the future.



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