Can Big Data Heal Ailing Health Systems? Not Without a New Social Perspective

Evan Galbraith
Department of Social Policy

Health care systems are becoming more complex and costly. The advent of big data and technological advances tantalisingly promise to revolutionise health care systems. The Learning Health Care System (LHCS) has emerged as a conceptual roadmap for the utilisation and application these advances. Proponents believe the LHCS will create insights powerful enough to overcome mounting complexities, costs, and inequitable outcomes. This paper takes an alternative perspective, however, and argues that the necessary transition to a more sustainable health care system will not be driven by data or tools alone, but rather by a paradigm shift in which health becomes viewed as a social phenomenon. It is only by integrating the social determinants of health into the currently prevailing biomedical approach that a LHCS can successfully manage these challenges. This paper proposes mechanisms to foster such a shift.