

Are the Terms and Conditions Offered by Cloud-Servers Safe for Personal Health Record-Keeping?

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Purpose: This exploratory paper investigates the terms and conditions offered by cloud service providers, questioning whether these are a safe environment for personal health record-keeping with regards to privacy, security and intellectual property control among other factors. We focus on evaluating the extent to which the privacy of sensitive information is protected in these systems as well as the extent to which terms provided comply with relevant regulations. Whilst many people may be excited about the introduction of cloud solutions to managing their personal health information, there are questions that we urge the public to ask before entrusting their sensitive health records to any cloud-service system.

Methods: This is an exploratory research based on Internet resources about terms and conditions offered by common cloud service providers used by many people. The researcher explores terms and conditions of four common cloud-servers, namely: Dropbox, Google Drive, Microsoft Health Vault and Microsoft's SkyDrive. To further augment the study, the researcher conducted a randomized, questionnaire-based survey at a local university in Zimbabwe, and engaged 100 users to provide responses regarding their use of these cloud-servers as processing and storage centres for their personal health records.

Results: The study establishes that users rarely read the terms and conditions; very few are concerned with finding out about the privacy, confidentiality and intellectual property issues pertain to their information stored in the cloud; yet, there is a potential loss of valuable information, or at least un-monitored transfer of property rights that may need careful scrutiny to decipher.

Conclusions: Several recommendations are made, among which include education of users to understand the meaning of terms and conditions offered, a call for the simplification of the terms and conditions and probable use of local 'home-grown' solutions.

Keywords: Cloud Server Solutions, Personal Health Records, Privacy and confidentiality