

Hack Aotearoa

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Regulate our data, please!

by Jamie Small

A leading researcher in the field of healthcare data science wants more, not less, regulation on how data is used.

Doctor Leo Anthony Celi is clinical research director and principal research scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Laboratory for Computational Physiology.

At the Hack Aotearoa 2020 Conference in Auckland this week, he made a case for stronger regulation and oversight of all data use, whether it involves healthcare or not.

Data can be a tremendous tool for improving the healthcare industry, Dr Leo says, but organisations can also use it for “nefarious purposes”.

While healthcare organisations are required to consult ethics committees before using people’s private data, many other organisations are not.

Dr Leo gave the example of FaceApp, a Russian app that collected millions of photos of people’s faces.

The app asked users to take a selfie, and using that image showed them what they might look like as they age.

There is little or no control over how FaceApp will use the data it has gathered from people’s photos, which could theoretically be used to train facial recognition software.

Dr Leo says there is a push from industry associations to regulate their own use of data, and there is a lot of discussion in the artificial intelligence (AI) industry about “AI ethics”.

“We think this is some marketing ploy,” he says.

“I’m not saying it’s wrong to have an interest in ethics,” Dr Leo says, but it should not be a barrier to regulation.

“We cannot trust industry to regulate itself.”