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## Technology Assessment and the Sociopolitics of Health Technologies

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In a growing number of countries, health technology assessment (HTA)

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has come to be seen as a vital component in policy making. Even though the assessment of the social, political, and ethical aspects of health technology is listed as one of its main objectives, in practice, the integration of such dimensions into HTA remains limited. Recent social scientific research on the inherently political nature of technology strongly supports such a comprehensive approach. The growing claims by and on behalf of consumer groups also suggest that HTA should be informed by a broader set of perspectives. Using the example of the cochlear implant in children, this essay compares the professed objectives of HTA with typical practice and explores possible explanations for the discrepancies observed. A second example, home tele-monitoring for elderly persons, demonstrates how the types of evidence considered by HTA and the process through which assessments are produced may be reconsidered. We argue for the formal integration of the sociopolitical dimensions of health care technologies into assessments. The ability of HTA to more fully address important issues from a public policy point of view will increase by making explicit the sociopolitical nature of health care technologies.

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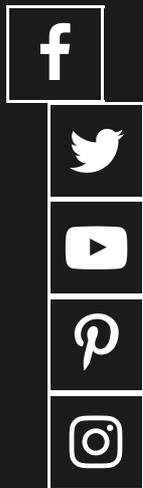
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