

Skype vs. VSee Videoconferencing – Privacy and Security Concerns for Researchers

Skype is a trusted, user friendly, encrypted and secure video communication system. However, it might not be recommended for video interviews that require a higher degree of privacy, security and reliability. In particular, researchers may want to, or be required to, look into alternative applications when conducting interviews involving personal health information.

An alternative recommended to MREB is VSee: <http://vsee.com/>

- Used a lot by healthcare professionals
- Secure and private for personal health information
- Basic service is free but pricing is up to \$200 a month
- More reliable broadband (fewer dropped calls) and higher level end-to-end encryption
- Downloadable at the Apple app store
- Can share other applications in conference mode

Most researchers reviewed by MREB have been using Skype. In today's world of Internet snooping by the NSA, Edward Snowden says there can be almost no expectations of privacy and security on the internet. However Skype does offer some advantages as well as disadvantages:

Advantages for researchers (and participants to use **Skype**):

- Free
- Familiar & popular
- Encrypted (but not at the highest level required by US regulations under HIPAA)

Disadvantages:

- Not HIPAA compliant for confidential health information (USA regulations)
- Skype may also not meet all the requirements of PHIPA (Ontario policy)
- Not recommended for confidential patient interviews
- Low sound and image quality experiences

For Personal Health Information Interviews regulated by OHIPA:

- Recommend using the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN) or the new OTNhub: <https://otnhub.ca/>
- Recommend using VSee
- Recommend using proprietary and secure telehealth alternative services, i.e., (Brainworks' eRehabilitation)

References:

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