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Emerging AI: Considerations for Healthcare Organizations Looking to Adopt Artificial Intelligence

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Lindsay Rowlands, MHA, is an associate at Acuvance Coker with over ten years of experience in healthcare operations and administrative support. Additionally, she provides support and guidance related to healthcare information technology by consulting on vendor-vetting projects as well as electronic medical record ("EMR") implementation initiatives. Lindsay is a collaborative team leader who has proven her ability to prioritize tasks and adapt to changing demands, all while maintaining the highest level of customer service.

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Introduction

Artificial intelligence is rapidly transforming healthcare, enabling organizations to streamline workflows and improve patient care. As adoption accelerates, organizations that do not utilize AI risk falling behind in a competitive and evolving industry.



What Can AI Do for Your Organization?

AI has significantly enhanced efficiency across healthcare organizations, streamlining workflows from the front desk to clinical and back-office operations. By automating repetitive tasks and optimizing processes, AI enhances productivity and allows providers and staff to focus more on patient care. Beyond this, it has the potential to reduce wasted resources, improve diagnostic processes, reduce medical errors, and create better outcomes for patients.[1] Several unique benefits of AI utilization in healthcare are explored below.

Benefits of AI in Healthcare Operations

1. Increased Time for Patient Care

AI tools streamline administrative and clinical workflows, freeing providers to focus more time and energy on patient care. A recent publication in Forbes showed that, on average, physicians spend over 90 minutes outside of normal business hours documenting patient care. AI solutions such as Suki, can significantly reduce that time requirement. Less time spent documenting can translate to more time spent where it matters most - with the patient.[2]

2. Improved Patient Satisfaction

Patients report greater satisfaction with providers who spend quality time with them during their appointments. As described above, AI tools enable providers to do just that. What's more, many patients appreciate and embrace advancements in healthcare technology because they enable greater efficiency and enhanced service.

3. Reduced Stress and Burden on Staff

AI alleviates the burden of repetitive, mundane tasks for healthcare staff. As previously described, advancements in AI-powered electronic medical record (EMR) systems reduce the time it takes to document patient care. Other AI tools enable clinical staff to spend less time on scheduling, reminder calls, and other routine activities. AI can even reduce labor requirements for intricate processes such as clinical trials. Ochsner Health recently collaborated with Deep 6 AI to streamline the patient selection process for a clinical trial. Using AI tools developed by Deep 6, they were able to scan unstructured patient data, rapidly eliminate patients who were not eligible for the trial, and recommend appropriate candidates. This automation reduced labor requirements for the trial team and effectively fast-tracked the trial's initiation.[3]

4. Elimination of Waste

By streamlining processes and workflows, AI minimizes wasted time and resources. For organizations struggling with high turnover and staff shortages, AI-powered tools can fill the gap, handling or assisting with many tasks previously performed by support staff. AI can even help reduce time waste by encouraging patients to arrive on time for their appointments. A published report by DOCPACE showed an increase in on-time arrivals from 54% to 74% in a pulmonary office after implementing an AI-powered solution for patient scheduling and care coordination.[4]

5. Optimized Provider Schedules

Enhanced workflows driven by AI enable providers to maximize their schedules, accommodating more patients and increasing revenue. This efficiency benefits both organizations and their patients by improving access to care.

6. Improved Diagnosis

Beyond its operational and administrative uses, AI can be harnessed to help physicians swiftly and accurately diagnose patient conditions. For example, AI-powered imaging tools can aid in cancer detection. According to a recent blog post by iCAD, such tools have enabled providers to "detect more cancers, with fewer unnecessary callbacks, and in less time."[5]



Types of AI in Healthcare Technology

Ambient Listening

Ambient listening is among the most widely integrated AI technologies in healthcare today. Tools such as Nuance's Dragon Ambient eXperience (DAX) enable physicians to record and transcribe patient-doctor encounters seamlessly, reducing time spent on documentation. According to a MedTech Intelligence report, "physicians spend an average of two hours a day outside regular working hours documenting patient interactions."[6] By automating this task, ambient listening not only enhances the quality of patient interactions but also alleviates the documentation burden on providers, improving both professional satisfaction and, potentially, patient outcomes.

Automation in Patient Outreach and Scheduling

AI-powered chatbots have emerged as a key driver of automation in healthcare. These tools support various tasks, including scheduling appointments, sending reminders, accessing medical histories and past appointment information, managing medications, and providing mental health support.[7] Chatbots like Ada assist in symptom checking, while Woebot offers mental health guidance.[8] Cleveland Clinic utilizes AI chatbots to address patient concerns.[7] By automating routine tasks, chatbots reduce administrative workloads and enhance patient engagement without sacrificing HIPAA compliance.

Predictive Analysis

Predictive analysis has become a cornerstone of AI applications in healthcare, particularly in radiology. Tools such as Aidoc and Zebra Medical Vision enable earlier detection of critical illnesses by automating image interpretation, reducing diagnostic errors, and alleviating staff burnout.[9] Predictive algorithms also play a significant role in disease management, with applications that anticipate risks such as sepsis onset and hospital readmission.[6] While these advancements promise to revolutionize care, concerns about altered patient care highlight the importance of proper oversight and implementation to ensure quality outcomes.



Challenges and Resistance to AI Adoption in Healthcare

Physician Acceptance

Physicians may resist adopting AI technologies out of concern about accuracy, the potential undermining of their expertise, and the challenge of integrating new tools into existing workflows. Technologies such as ambient listening, which automates documentation, may make providers wary who are unfamiliar with their reliability. Furthermore, some physicians fear that reliance on AI could devalue their clinical judgment and skills.

Strategies to Address Physician Concerns:

- **Provide Comprehensive Training:** Develop training programs tailored to physicians that emphasize how AI enhances, rather than replaces, their expertise. For example, explain how ambient listening reduces after-hours documentation burdens, allowing providers to focus more on patient care.
- **Demonstrate Tangible Benefits:** Share case studies or testimonials from trusted peers that showcase positive impacts of AI on efficiency and patient outcomes.
- **Foster Collaboration:** Engage physicians in the process of selecting and implementing AI tools to build trust and ensure the technologies chosen align with their needs.

Patient Acceptance

Patients, particularly those from older generations and lower socioeconomic groups, often hesitate to embrace AI due to a lack of understanding and concerns about privacy and cost. A 2019 study found that many patients worry about the security of their data and rely on physicians to ensure it is handled safely by the AI tools in use. Others fear AI could increase the cost of healthcare services, including routine office visits and diagnostic tests.[10]

Strategies to Enhance Patient Trust:

- **Conduct Educational Outreach:** Simplify complex AI concepts and educate patients about the safeguards in place to protect their data and privacy. Make use of tools like brochures, videos, and patient portals to provide education.
- **Highlight Physician Oversight:** Reassure patients that physicians oversee all AI-driven processes to ensure safety and accuracy. Empower physicians to be part of the discovery process and encourage questions to prepare providers to respond to patient concerns.
- **Address Cost Concerns:** Emphasize how AI reduces overall healthcare costs by streamlining processes, reducing redundancies, and enabling earlier detection of illnesses.

Accuracy and Reliability Concerns

Accuracy questions remain a significant barrier to AI adoption, with concerns about flawed predictions, inherent data bias, and minimal regulatory oversight driving hesitancy. As noted in a previously cited article, adaptive AI systems evolve as they process new data, making regulation challenging.[1]

Strategies to Overcome Accuracy Concerns:

- **Conduct Pilot Testing:** Conduct extensive pilot testing to ensure AI solutions are reliable and meet the organization's specific needs.

- **Implement Transparent Algorithms:** Prioritize AI tools with auditable and explainable algorithms, ensuring healthcare professionals understand the decision-making processes they use.

- **Advocate for Regulation:** Support policies that establish standardized guidelines for AI in healthcare. Ensure compliance with HIPAA and emerging issues related to adaptive systems. Many organizations are implementing governance committees dedicated solely to AI oversight.



Security Concerns

As previously mentioned, patients and providers alike express understandable concerns about data security and confidentiality in AI systems. Tracking technologies raise fears about unauthorized patient tracking and the potential for data misuse. Moreover, some worry that AI systems may not adhere to HIPAA standards, putting organizations at risk for data breaches and compliance violations.[11] The recent Change Healthcare security breach affected millions and put confidential data at risk, fanning the flames over privacy and accessibility concerns.

Strategies to Mitigate Security Risks:

- **Ensure HIPAA Compliance:** Partner with vendors who prioritize HIPAA compliance with clear protocols for data encryption, access controls, and audit trails.

- **Promote Data Transparency:** Clearly communicate how AI systems collect, store, and use patient data.

- **Adopt Robust Cybersecurity Measures:** Implement cybersecurity protocols such as regular system audits and penetration testing to protect against breaches.



Discrimination and Bias

AI systems can inherit biases from the data on which they are trained, leading to discriminatory outcomes. For instance, biases related to race, gender, or socioeconomic status can inadvertently influence predictions or recommendations. Additionally, AI tools may have hampered functionality when striving to provide equitable care in underserved areas. Predictive models often lack data from healthcare deserts.[12]

Strategies to Address Bias:

- **Incorporate Diverse and Inclusive Training Data:** Use datasets representing diverse populations to reduce inherent biases.

- **Conduct Regular Auditing for Bias:** Routinely evaluate AI systems for unintended biases and adjust algorithms to correct disparities.

- **Focus on Equity:** Tailor AI implementation to consider the needs of underserved populations, ensuring that healthcare access gaps are not perpetuated.



Unmet Expectations

Despite promises of increased efficiency, some physicians report that AI tools fail to meet their expectations. Implementation errors and inefficient use of the tools provided can lead to additional work, such as follow-up reviews and re-entering data.

Strategies to Align Expectations:

- **Set Realistic Goals:** Clearly communicate what AI can and cannot do during the implementation process. Avoid overpromising benefits.

- **Make Iterative Improvements:** Use provider feedback to continuously improve the functionality of AI tools, addressing pain points as they arise and anticipating user needs.

- **Monitor Impact:** Regularly assess whether the AI tools selected are meeting intended goals, such as reducing documentation time and improving patient outcomes.







Preserving the Human Touch in Medicine

A common concern surrounding AI is its potential to depersonalize healthcare, diminishing the human connection essential to providing quality care. This concern is particularly evident in the mental health field, where empathy is crucial. Psychology Today notes, “Although AI can enhance care, it does not replace the human connection that is so important to mental health treatment.”[13]

Strategies to Preserve Human Connection:

- **Use AI to Augment, Not Replace:** Leverage AI for administrative tasks such as scheduling and documentation to free up providers’ time for patient interactions.

- **Maintain Oversight:** Ensure that AI serves as a supportive tool, with healthcare professionals making final decisions. Encourage providers not to rely too heavily on AI tools, using them instead as supplemental instruments for streamlining the patient experience to elevate care delivery.

- **Emphasize Empathy:** Incorporate provider training on the importance of preserving compassionate patient care while making use of AI tools. Bedside manner is irreplaceable by AI.



Tailored AI Solutions for Healthcare Success

At Coker, we leverage over 35 years of experience in healthcare IT to guide organizations through the complexities of AI implementation. Our comprehensive services are designed to ensure seamless integration and optimal performance of AI solutions within your unique healthcare setting.

Vendor/System Selection

Choosing the right AI system is critical, and the selection process can be complex. Our structured approach will help you identify and prioritize system requirements, ensuring the selection of a solution that aligns with your operational needs and budget. We will guide you through the entire selection process, from identifying practice needs to conducting vendor demonstrations and reference checks.

System Implementation

Implementing a new AI system requires careful planning and customization – it's not a one-size-fits-all solution. Our team will work closely with you to deliver a solution that reflects your organization's unique requirements. We will develop tailored implementation strategies to optimize workflows and processes in the new system, assisting with employee education and internal adoption and helping achieve quality performance.

System Migration and Optimization

Transitioning from legacy systems to new AI platforms involves complex data migration and system optimization. Our data migration specialists will ensure the integrity and quality of your data are maintained during the transition process. Post-implementation, we will evaluate ways to optimize the system, enhance performance, and achieve your strategic objectives.

By partnering with Acuvance Coker, your organization can reap the maximum benefits of AI technology solutions while effectively addressing user and patient concerns. We aim to ensure your investment in AI leads to improved operational efficiency, enhanced patient care, and a solid return.

Before investing your time, money, and internal resources into a solution, consider allowing us to vet it alongside you. We can help ensure no aspect of the selection and implementation process is overlooked. Our extensive experience with a wide range of clients, from small practices to large enterprise organizations, positions us as a trusted partner in your AI implementation journey.

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