
Navigating Patient Concerns: AI Governance in Healthcare



Patients are becoming increasingly vocal about how artificial intelligence (AI) is being integrated into their healthcare continuum. While concerns about AI are prominent, patients also express anxiety about other healthcare technologies like interoperability and cybersecurity, though in different ways. The unique apprehension surrounding AI stems from a variety of factors that differentiate it from other technologies. Patients have specific concerns about AI, comparing them to issues related to interoperability and cybersecurity.

The Demand for Interoperability

Patients universally desire the portability of their health records as they navigate through different providers within and outside healthcare networks. The frustration of discovering that crucial medical records, such as CT scans, are unavailable at another hospital within the same network is all too common. This need for seamless information flow is vital for ensuring continuity of care and avoiding unnecessary repeat procedures. Similarly, the protection of personal health data from cyber threats is a non-negotiable expectation among patients. Any breach of this data is unacceptable and causes significant anxiety. However, while these concerns are significant, the unease around AI takes on a different dimension.

AI-Specific Concerns

The anxiety patients have regarding AI, and particularly generative AI in healthcare, is influenced by several new factors. Unlike other technologies, AI's integration into healthcare brings specific issues to the forefront:

- **Accuracy and Reliability:** Patients across all demographics have heard stories of AI's potential for false positives and negatives and the occasional "hallucinations" that grab headlines. This can lead to a new era where patients transition from using Dr Google to consulting Dr ChatGPT, emphasising the need for generative digital health literacy. Here, healthcare provider brands must become trusted sources of accurate information.
- **Privacy and Data Security:** Patients are concerned about the ability of AI algorithms to ensure data privacy and secure storage within Electronic Medical Records (EMRs). Even sophisticated healthcare vendors struggle with integrating AI-generated data while maintaining its confidentiality and actionable insights. The fear is that AI might compromise the privacy and integrity of their health records.
- **Transparency and Trust:** Healthcare systems have historically been reluctant to fully share patient records, a situation that persists despite regulations like the 21st Century Cures Act aimed at improving transparency. With AI, there is an added layer of paranoia that AI-generated data may not be fully disclosed due to legal and ethical concerns, exacerbating patients' mistrust.

Demographic and Societal Influences

Demographic factors also shape the response to AI in healthcare, sometimes in counterintuitive ways. Seniors, who are generally less familiar with AI, are less likely to inquire about its use in their care. Conversely, their tech-savvy children are more engaged, questioning AI's accuracy, privacy implications, and potential to replace human intuition in clinical decisions. Additionally, many older physicians share their patients' scepticism towards AI, adding another layer of complexity to its acceptance in healthcare.

While patients' concerns about AI in healthcare are significant and multifaceted, it is important to recognise the empirical benefits AI brings to patient care. The positive outcomes are improved diagnostic accuracy, enhanced treatment plans, and personalised medicine tailored to individual genetic and medical profiles. AI also offers efficiency and convenience, streamlining administrative tasks and providing continuous support through virtual assistants. As healthcare providers work to address concerns about privacy, security, equity, and the reduction of human intuition, patients' perceptions of AI will continue to evolve. Balancing these concerns with the undeniable benefits of AI is essential for fostering trust and acceptance among patients and healthcare professionals alike.

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Published on : Thu, 11 Jul 2024