

Letters to the Editor

Artificial Intelligence

I read with great interest the article, “Will Artificial Intelligence Undermine the Profession of Medicine?” in the recent edition of *The Pharos* (Autumn 2024, pp2-8). The last paragraph of your Introduction really summarizes what I feel should be AI’s role in the delivery of quality medical care to patients. In the main article, I suddenly became aware of the abundance of statements by the authors that were posed as questions.

It seems that we are plunging headlong into a complex technology that not only does things faster than humans, but can also learn and “think” like humans. Therein lies the issue. Machine learning is not the same as human learning because machines lack compassion and human understanding. It’s difficult to teach humans to be compassionate and understanding, and I think it would be impossible to teach a machine. And, how would we teach machines those qualities? Would we make available to the machines all of the philosophical works that have ever been recorded on the subject and allow it to formulate its own opinion? We might not like the result. And what happens when the machine reaches a point where it doesn’t care what the human controller thinks and the machine can’t be overridden? That’s where science fiction can suddenly become fact.

I have participated in some AI experiences involving generation of medical histories from patients. While these were first iteration-type projects, the results obtained were woefully inadequate to explain what was going on with the patient. I have also heard anecdotal reports of patients being reluctant to speak to a machine.

I can remember when electronic health records (EHR) first started being discussed and how they would revolutionize the conveyance of medical information and improve care and outcomes, which seemed to be assumptions made from what I now only half-jokingly call “The Journal of Personal Experience and Unpublished Results.” In what is now decades of results, we have several EHR systems that have risen to the top, but none of them “talk” easily to each other. They have become mechanisms to maximize billing to feed the “Medical Industrial Complex” and remove us further from eye and physical contact with patients with the pressure to produce more and more relative value units and profit in shrinking appointment times.

AI is a huge genie that once out of the bottle has the potential to do great harm. We should approach this new technology as we would any other new technology, with great caution. In answer to the question raised by the article’s title, based on what I know and what is not known about AI, I would say the answer is, “Yes.”

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