Guidance on using artificial intelligence (AI) in patient care

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to technologies that simulate human intelligence and enable the use of data to learn, reason, self-correct and create new content. It includes technologies that, for example:

- analyse images, numbers, speech, language, or text in a clinical setting; or
- generate content or act autonomously in ways that can influence clinical decisions.

AI is already being used in many areas of medical practice, such as to support diagnosis, assist with determining treatment options, streamline clinical documentation, support disease surveillance and prevention, and perform tasks that can improve health care quality, access, and efficiency. It is essential that AI is used ethically and responsibly, to ensure patient safety and the privacy of health information.

This guidance explains what doctors should consider when using AI as part of patient care. For clarity, this includes:

- AI that is embedded into medical devices and existing technology
- AI scribing tools used to create or support clinical notes
- AI tools that manage clinical in-boxes, since they can contain information about test results or otherwise influence access to care.

This guidance does not cover AI used only for non-clinical, operational, or administrative tasks that do not relate to patient care. However, these AI systems should still be used in a transparent and responsible way, and in line with data security and health information privacy requirements.

Guidance for doctors using AI in patient care

Accountability and duty of care

1. The doctor-patient relationship and the delivery of patient-centred care remain central to medical practice, no matter how advanced or efficient the technology you use. Before using AI in patient care, you must be satisfied that it is safe and suitable for the patient, and clinically justified.

2. When using AI in your practice, you must continue to work within your scope. AI should only be used to support or complement your practice where you are skilled,

trained and competent, and where you can accurately interpret the AI's output for the individual patient.

3. You should know whether the digital tools you use involve AI. While you are not expected to be an AI or IT expert, you should have a general understanding of what the AI technology is designed to be used for, and its main capabilities and limitations.

4. AI is not a substitute for your clinical judgement, and you remain responsible for all your clinical decisions and actions. AI can make mistakes or reflect bias and may produce inaccurate or fabricated information. Therefore, as far as is reasonably practicable, you should check the accuracy of any AI output and confirm it is appropriate for the individual patient before using it for patient care or including it in patient records.

5. Maintaining clear and accurate clinical records is a requirement for all aspects of medical practice. Where AI influences clinical decision-making, you should document its use in the patient's notes. If the use of AI is outside usual practice, or if you do not follow an AI recommendation and this has significant implications for patient care, you should include your reasoning in the patient's notes.

6. AI may be used to provide general health information to patients, or for education and training. However, you must not use AI to impersonate yourself in medical practice, including through avatars or chatbots. Your Medical Council registration and practising certificate apply to you as an individual and cannot be transferred to an AI system.

Transparency

7. Patients should know when AI is being used in their care. For low-risk AI, this can be explained in a simple statement that describes how AI is used in their care and how their data is protected. For high-risk AI that influences clinical decisions, you must explicitly inform the patient.

8. Use your professional judgement to decide how much detail to provide to the patient. Your explanation should match the level of risk and reflect the patient's (or their legal guardian's) ability to understand.

Informed consent

9. There are some specific situations where you need to obtain informed consent for the use of AI, including when:
    a. using an AI tool to record the consultation, such as a transcription tool (scribe)
    b. the patient's personal details are shared outside of the primary medical record or used for AI training in a way that could identify them
    c. the AI technology plays a significant role in diagnosis, treatment or delivery of care.

10. In these situations, let the patient know how their care will be affected if they decide against the use of AI. Always document in the patient's records whether informed consent was obtained.

Patient privacy, data security and patient safety

11. Only use AI in patient care where there is appropriate oversight of the technology. If the AI system is not approved or endorsed by your employer, institution or professional body, you must take reasonable steps to assure yourself that it is safe and suitable for use.

12. Check that adequate privacy and data security safeguards are in place. The AI technology must not share patient-identifiable information outside of the care setting, and patient information must be securely stored, in line with relevant laws and accepted practice.

13. The safety and effectiveness of AI depends on the quality of its data and how it is trained and tested. The data sources used by the AI technology need to be accurate, reliable, and relevant to your patient group to achieve optimal clinical outcomes and maximise patient safety. You should take care to ensure patients are not harmed or treated unfairly, and that existing inequities in the health care system are not worsened, by hidden biases in the AI technology.

Continuing professional development

14. As AI is a rapidly developing aspect of medical practice, the Council encourages medical colleges, professional associations and employers to support doctors' education and professional development in this area. This includes providing access to high-quality educational resources and guidelines so that doctors and other health professionals can use AI safely and effectively in patient care.

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