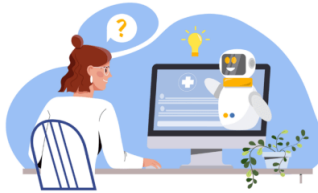# AI Chatbots Improve Patient Experience, but Transparency and Trust are Crucial

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a pivotal tool in reshaping patient care, with virtual care assistants playing a significant role in augmenting healthcare professionals' capabilities. During the HIMSS 2024 preconference Virtual Care Forum, experts emphasised the importance of building trust as these technologies evolve.

Chatbots proved their efficacy, but the approach should stay tailored to patients' needs

Matt Cybulsky, founder of Ionian Healthcare Consulting, led a discussion on building trust in virtual agents and chatbots, joined by Andy Chu from Providence Health and Kathleen Mazza from Northwell Health. Mazza highlighted Northwell's early adoption of chatbots since 2018, proving beneficial during the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020 when New York became an epicentre for the pandemic. By targeting high-risk diagnoses like heart failure, COPD, and stroke, Northwell effectively utilized chatbots to reduce avoidable readmissions, demonstrating the potential of AI in healthcare.

Chu noted a shift in patient perception, with many now viewing technologies like chatbots akin to text messaging. Understanding why patients turn to these platforms is crucial, as revealed by Providence's experience, where nearly 40% of messages received were administrative rather than clinical. Recognising this, Providence implemented features like assessing patients' eligibility for financial assistance through chatbots, demonstrating a proactive approach to patient care, and system navigation.

AI supports patient engagement, but human presence is still needed

Mazza emphasised the importance of meaningful patient interactions with chatbots, cautioning against lengthy interactions that may become burdensome. Ensuring actionable outcomes from these conversations is crucial to maintaining patient engagement and satisfaction. Both Mazza and Chu underscored the significance of building patient trust and confidence in chatbots, recognising the need for human intervention when necessary. Mazza highlighted Northwell's approach, integrating a human presence through alerts triggered by certain patient responses, ensuring a seamless transition to human care when needed.

Patient education and trust in AI are crucial for to meaningful chatbots interactions

The evolution of AI-enabled virtual care assistants represents a transformative shift in healthcare delivery, offering unprecedented opportunities to enhance patient engagement, improve outcomes, and optimise resource allocation. However, as these technologies advance, the imperative to build and maintain patient trust remains paramount. Providers must continue to invest in refining AI algorithms, ensuring accuracy, reliability, and alignment with clinical best practices. Moreover, they must prioritise user experience, designing interfaces that facilitate meaningful interactions and streamline workflows.

Crucially, providers must foster transparency and communication, educating patients about the capabilities and limitations of AI-enabled solutions while emphasising the complementary role of human caregivers. By doing so, providers can instill confidence in patients, fostering a collaborative approach to care that leverages the full spectrum of available resources.

As AI-enabled virtual care assistants continue to evolve, the healthcare industry stands on the cusp of a transformative era, where technology complements human expertise to deliver personalised, efficient, and accessible care to all. Through thoughtful implementation and ongoing refinement, providers can harness the full potential of AI to redefine patient care and improve health outcomes for generations to come.

Source: HIMSS 2024
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