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Will robots take your job in healthcare?

Is artificial intelligence set to take over the health sector?

With experts predicting AI will replace human beings in multiple professional settings, Brigette Hyacinth examines the potential impact on healthcare.



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Many consultant firms have looked into the future and predicted that robots will take over jobs in legal services and accountancy. Jobs like insurance underwriters and claims representatives, bank tellers and representatives, financial analysts and construction workers, inventory managers and stock listings, taxi drivers, and manufacturing are coming into extinction. All of these fields employ a huge headcount.

Blue collar manufacturing jobs are being replaced at an increasing rate by the hundreds of thousands as robots are being deployed into many factories and workplaces across the world. Robotic process automation (RPA) offers huge cost reductions. RPA-based processes run non-stop, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and they're fast.

New technologies will create new opportunities in many fields. There's an unprecedented shortage of programmers, data scientists, cybersecurity experts and IT specialists, among others. For example, there's currently a massive shortage of skilled workers in the cybersecurity sector and it's rising.

I have no doubt that technology will create new job roles, but will displace many more jobs than it creates and at a much faster pace than in previous revolutions. Jobs will be lost at a greater pace than ever before, a rate that might pass the threshold of our ability as a nation to provide a reasonable level of employment for all persons. This isn't like the industrial revolution of the 19th century. This is not replacing some jobs by machinery; it is replacing people with intelligent machinery. There's a fundamental difference in eliminating some jobs from the labour market (to be replaced by other jobs), and eliminating humans in general from the labour market (to be replaced by machines). The industrial revolution involved human augmentation. This coming revolution involves human replacement. The entire point of automation is to reduce overhead. How do you

do that? You remove salaries, benefits, and human error. What happens to the humans? Robots and AI will take jobs and not everyone can be re-trained.

Every single technological advance in human history has brought new economic opportunities and increased the living standards of everyone. That is because every single technological advance in human history has leveraged the productivity of everyone. AI will enormously leverage the productivity of those very few who have specialty skills.

“ I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT TECHNOLOGY WILL CREATE NEW JOB ROLES, BUT WILL DISPLACE MANY MORE JOBS ”

Despite the massive potential of AI systems, they are still far from replacing many kinds of tasks that people are good at or tasks that require creativity, innovation, or empathy. The jobs that are most at risk are those which “are on some level routine, repetitive, and predictable.” The trend of technology is to always replace the lowest strata of workers. Many of these are unwilling or incapable of improving their intellectual capacity to get ahead of the curve. A big part of today's workforce will still become redundant. Secondly, the ageing population of Western mature countries reinforces the point above.

I believe we could see a world where data and technology replace entire classes of employment. We need to be paying close attention and invest in the job skills and education sectors that are anticipated to grow.

It was once believed that the purpose of enterprise is to provide employment. This is no longer the case as boosting shareholder value has taken

precedence. Businesses are looking for every method to reduce cost and/or human error so they can maintain a competitive edge in the global market place. It's about competition and they will reasonably do what they have to, to survive. Outsource or automate—whatever will reduce costs. So, take active steps to keep yourself relevant in the job market.

What could this mean for healthcare? Artificial intelligence (AI) is causing some amazing breakthroughs on the medical scene—a new, smarter age of healthcare. It's the path toward an entirely new system that predicts disease and delivers personalised health and wellness services to entire populations. The inclusion of AI would help achieve a more accurate diagnosis and greater efficiency.

Today, empowered by the vast amount of health information available online and on apps, and by the array of health and fitness wearables, many people are much less dependent on their doctors for advice. Chatbots are also being used to revolutionise communication within hospitals and patients.

Many healthcare professionals feel their jobs are at risk. Their biggest concern is that they could be replaced by machines. Yes, jobs would be lost but new ones will be created. The goal isn't to replace physicians or healthcare professionals, but give them better decision-making tools. AI should integrate with the human element of the healthcare service rendered, and not replace it altogether. These developments will allow doctors to focus more on the human aspects of patient care, such as empathy. The only way to win in an artificial world is to be human. It's about incorporating new technologies but maintaining that human factor. We must always remember nothing can replace the "human touch." ■

KEY POINTS



- ✓ Experts predict robots will take over jobs that are repetitive
- ✓ The industrial revolution involved human augmentation while AI ascension involves human replacement
- ✓ AI systems can't replace the human gifts of creativity, innovation or empathy
- ✓ In healthcare, AI could be best utilised for enhanced decision making rather than personnel replacement

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