



## How 'AI Hesitancy' is Hindering Healthcare



Artificial intelligence is behind the development of innovative tools that are increasingly used in healthcare, including health chatbots and virtual assistants. Some hospitals have already deployed chatbots to help patients schedule appointments with their doctors. There are also chatbots that assist patients in learning to cope with some chronic conditions.

The growing use of AI-led tools and services is one way to address the shortage of medical workers, according to researchers. Studies also show that AI is useful in streamlining medical and administrative processes leading to more cost-effective delivery of care. In the UK, one report says that AI and automation is likely to translate into annual savings of £12.5 billion for the NHS.

Notably, results of a new study led by the University of Westminster point to the so-called "AI hesitancy" – or public's reluctance to use AI-led services for their healthcare, especially with regard to more serious illnesses. The public's AI hesitancy is due to a lack of understanding of this technology and concerns about privacy, cybersecurity and the inability of AI-led chatbots to sympathise, according to the study, titled "Acceptability of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-led chatbot services in healthcare: A mixed-method study."

For this pioneering study, researchers utilised 29 semi-structured interviews which helped them develop an online survey advertised via social media. The survey, which included 216 participants, explored a range of demographic and attitudinal variables, including questions about acceptability and perceived effectiveness of AI in healthcare. Interviews were recorded and analysed thematically.

The researchers identified three broad themes: 'Understanding of chatbots', 'AI hesitancy' and 'Motivations for health chatbots', highlighting public concern about accuracy, cybersecurity and the inability of AI-led chatbots to empathise. The findings are published in the journal *Digital Health*.

As noted by Dr Tom Nadarzynski, lead researcher from the University of Westminster, the study shows that a large proportion of the public remains hesitant to use AI-led tools and services for their health, particularly for severe or stigmatised conditions. These findings come at a crucial time following the UK government's announcement of £250 million funding for AI implementation within the NHS.

The study cites the need to address such kind of hesitancy regarding AI technology as this issue could hinder healthcare innovation. Dr Nadarzynski and co-authors suggest that AI tool developers should employ user-centred and theory-based approaches addressing patients' concerns and optimising user experience in order to achieve the best uptake and utilisation.

By involving the public in the design and development of AI in healthcare, according to Dr Nadarzynski, "the problem of 'AI hesitancy' hindering the improvement of healthcare provision could be addressed and the technology could make a real difference to the patients."

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