
Is Healthcare Studying the Right Aspects of GenAI's Administrative Role?



Generative AI (GenAI) has gained significant traction in healthcare, particularly in administrative functions like workflow optimisation and patient engagement. While the healthcare industry is known for its cautious approach to adopting new technologies, especially those that directly impact patient care, its enthusiasm for implementing GenAI in administrative contexts is growing rapidly. However, there is growing concern about whether healthcare truly invests enough in understanding and evaluating these administrative applications before diving too deeply. Without thorough scrutiny, organisations risk deploying tools that might inadvertently introduce new challenges or risks to patient outcomes.

The Risk-Averse Nature of Healthcare

Healthcare organisations are justifiably known for their risk-averse culture due to the potentially life-altering consequences of failure. This cautious approach has, for the most part, ensured that emerging technologies are rigorously tested and validated before becoming integral to clinical practices. GenAI, like other AI-driven innovations, presents unique risks, particularly in areas where accuracy, fairness and trustworthiness are paramount. In clinical decision-making, the stakes are high, making healthcare providers and regulators hesitant to rely on GenAI tools that may lack extensive validation or robust real-world evidence.

However, healthcare's careful stance regarding GenAI's administrative functions seems to be waning. Administrative tasks like documentation, coding, billing and patient communication are being assigned to GenAI with increasing confidence. These areas are perceived as relatively low-risk since they predominantly deal with back-office functions or tasks that clinicians handle away from direct patient interaction. Yet, the lack of immediate patient-facing implications does not negate the potential for adverse outcomes, particularly in interconnected systems where back-office errors can lead to clinical complications.

Limited Research Focus on Administrative Applications

A significant discrepancy emerges when examining the volume of research dedicated to GenAI's clinical versus administrative applications. A study reviewing literature published between 2022 and 2024 revealed that a large proportion of research on GenAI centres around testing its clinical acumen, with nearly half of the reviewed studies focused on evaluating the models' ability to mimic medical expertise. Research efforts have also gravitated towards diagnosing conditions and improving patient education.

In stark contrast, only a few studies have explored administrative tasks such as automating billing codes or summarising clinical notes. The emphasis on clinical evaluations indicates a bias in understanding GenAI's capabilities, potentially leaving administrative applications under-scrutinised. This oversight might be due to the assumption that administrative functions carry lower risk, leading to fewer demands for rigorous academic validation. However, as AI systems increasingly influence operations, including revenue cycles and compliance workflows, the lack of comprehensive research could leave gaps in understanding potential risks.

The Overlooked Interconnectedness of Healthcare Operations

Healthcare is an ecosystem where administrative and clinical processes are deeply intertwined. Despite the perceived safety of administrative GenAI applications, every aspect of healthcare operations ultimately contributes to patient outcomes. For instance, errors in pre-authorisation or incorrect coding influenced by AI could delay essential care or affect patient billing, impacting their healthcare experience and well-being.

Interestingly, even when administrative AI tools are studied, the criteria used to measure their success are often narrow. Accuracy remains the primary metric, while fairness, bias and deployment considerations receive significantly less attention. This narrow focus on accuracy might be insufficient in identifying risks that extend beyond isolated tasks to the broader care continuum. The failure to account for fairness and bias can

introduce unintended consequences, especially in workflows that connect directly or indirectly with patient care.

The rapid adoption of GenAI for administrative tasks in healthcare raises essential questions about whether enough research is being conducted to truly understand the risks and benefits. While administrative functions may seem lower risk than clinical decision-making, the interconnected nature of healthcare systems means that every operational change has the potential to impact patient outcomes. The limited focus on administrative applications in existing research indicates that stakeholders might overlook key areas where risks could emerge. As GenAI investments continue to surge, the industry must broaden its research scope and adopt a more holistic approach to evaluating AI tools. By doing so, healthcare organisations can ensure that their administrative innovations are safe, reliable and equitable for all stakeholders.

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Published on : Mon, 28 Oct 2024