Health systems will turbocharge their AI strategies in 2022—but it won't come without challenges

Article

The data: Health systems are prioritizing digital health technologies focused on patient access, AI, and telehealth, per a recent December 2021 KLAS and Center for Connected Medicine survey.

- **36% of health execs think patient access** has the greatest potential to be improved with digital health tech and innovation.

- **38% think AI** is the most exciting emerging technology in the next two years (that includes predictive analytics, machine learning, and robotic process automation).

- **62% say telehealth** is an area that has seen the greatest progress in the last two years.

The promise of AI in healthcare: AI's ability to assist clinical diagnostics and absolve burnt out healthcare workforces of admin tasks has health execs ready to kick their AI investments into high gear.

AI-powered predictive tools can help map out disease progression, diagnoses, and help streamline providers' clinical decision-making:

- **40% of healthcare executives are excited about AI's potential** to improve diagnosis and predict outcomes, per Optum's 2021 healthcare AI survey of 500 senior healthcare execs.

On the other hand, AI can help automate administrative drudgery (like prior authorizations and other insurance paperwork) so clinicians can better focus on providing quality care.

- In fact, nearly **72% of healthcare execs say they'd trust AI** to support nonclinical, admin processes that take away time providers could be spending with patients, per Optum.

The challenge with healthcare AI: Many health professionals have been wary of the tech's potential for errors and biases when it comes to diagnostic applications.

There's uncertainty around the integrity and diversity of data that AI algorithms are modeled on—something that leads to inaccurate outputs and medical errors.

- To add, most clinicians are wary about using AI in their healthcare practice: **Around 95% of clinicians believe AI for diagnostic imaging is inconsistent** or doesn't work at all, according to a recent FDA study.

Plus, a bug in one AI system could affect thousands of patients, as opposed to a provider's human error affecting just one. With an increasing number of cybersecurity attacks on
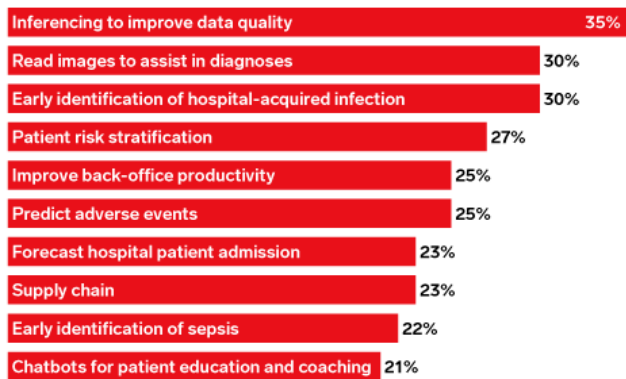
healthcare, this could pose a significant risk.

What's next? As more health systems secure a stronger footing in healthcare AI, the next step will be to make new AI capabilities mesh with both digital health technologies and existing healthcare processes.

- Digital health companies like **Sharecare** are offering health systems all-in-one healthcare models that span value-based care, telehealth, digital therapeutics, and AI-powered analytics that connect all of the aforementioned.

- Even telehealth giants like **Amwell** are tapping tech players like **Google Cloud** to integrate AI capabilities that improve patient experience and clinical decision support for providers.

Use Cases for AI in Healthcare According to Health Executives in US, UK, and Germany, May 2020
% of respondents

Use Case	%
Inferencing to improve data quality	35%
Read images to assist in diagnoses	30%
Early identification of hospital-acquired infection	30%
Patient risk stratification	27%
Improve back-office productivity	25%
Predict adverse events	25%
Forecast hospital patient admission	23%
Supply chain	23%
Early identification of sepsis	22%
Chatbots for patient education and coaching	21%

Note: n=210
Source: International Data Corporation (IDC), "AI in Healthcare: Early Stage with Steady March to Maturity", Dec 2, 2020

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