

Coincidentally I have had a recent retina issue with my Ophthalmologist as a result of my premature Cataract operation. I pointed out things he had done in error as pointed out by AI. I walked out

Then I happened upon this OpEd -S.E.

On the subject of AI and Doctors

by Jeff Childers

We've recently discussed the looming tidal wave of health innovations fueled by AI, with biomedical startups leading the way. Now let's look at a second dimension of the same phenomenon: Doctors. Doctors are starting to freak out. Patients, fueled by post-pandemic distrust and AI chatbots, are arriving at appointments armed with detailed knowledge about their conditions, catching doctors unprepared. Last September, a Substack called The Next Big Idea reviewed Charlotte Blease's new book, Dr. Bot, in a post titled, "**The A.I. Will See You Now: Why Your Doctor's Days Are Numbered.**"



CLIP: Dr. Park also thinks his days might be numbered, because nowadays patients are asking 'hard' questions (2:27).

In a viral clip making the rounds this week, a different doctor posted a classic in-car video (who started this trend?) expressing doubts about the continued viability of his selected profession. “I don’t know about other doctors out there,” he began, “but for the first time in the past few weeks, I’m truly feeling that our days are numbered because of AI.” Instead of being passive recipients, which was true for the entire lifetimes of anyone reading this post, patients are arriving at appointments as active participants in their own healthcare. “My patients are coming in with very, very difficult questions,” Dr. Park explained. “They are high-level, very granular, nuanced type of questions that I’ve never been asked before in previous years.”

Patients are using information to test their doctors’ competence. “For instance, I was asked what the incidence rate was for retinal detachment in the United States,” he said. “I just felt like I was in the hot seat, and I was being interrogated or being pimped by an attending.” He admitted that the patient relationship was already strained to begin with — the covid effect— but “now, with AI, patients realize they can get a lot of stuff they need from their AI chatbot, and with that, the level of expectation from a real, in-person human doctor is just gonna go even higher.”



Dr. Blease is a healthcare researcher at Harvard Medical School. In her book, subtitled “How Doctors Can Fail Us—and How AI Could Save Lives,” she argues five points for how AI will democratize healthcare and become the physician we need.

First, AI will reduce misdiagnoses. “Medical error,” Blease said, “is one of the leading causes of death in the United States and is responsible for over a quarter of a million fatalities annually.” Second, doctors are sick. “In the U.S., half of all doctors say they are burned out, with 20 percent reporting they are depressed,” she noted. It’s so hard to keep up! “By graduation, half of what medical students learn is already outdated.”

Third, AI has better access to critical information than doctors do. Comparing AI to “speed-freak bookworms,” Blease pointed out that “AI has a stunning capacity to ingest medical publications and data in seconds, 24/7.” Even if AI sometimes does err, she said, the right question is: who makes fewer mistakes? Fourth, chatbots are less biased. Again, even if AI reflects training bias, “de-biasing AI is likely a more achievable goal than debiasing doctors’ split-second decisions in high-pressure clinics.”

Fifth, she pointed out research showing that “patients tend to be more talkative with machines. They’re more likely to disclose sensitive or embarrassing symptoms, challenge opinions, and ask questions.” What she didn’t say, but which is painfully obvious to anyone who’s tried it, is that AI has infinite patience, a virtue relatively scarce among time-pressed physicians. You can ask ChatGPT the same dumb question ten times in a row, and it will keep trying to answer in a slightly different way.

A now-three-year old JAMA study found that “chatbot responses were preferred over physician responses and rated significantly higher for both quality and empathy.” The bots are even smarter now. **JAMA, April 2023:**

Comparing Physician and Artificial Intelligence Chatbot Responses to Patient Questions Posted to a Public Social Media Forum

I am not dunking on doctors (except for the bottom-feeders who swallowed the CDC's pandemic guidelines hook, line, and sinker, but never mind). Lawyers like me are in the same sinking boat, except that we're sitting a little further back. My clients are already drafting their own contracts, demand letters, and are sending in cute legal memos which were obviously penned by ChatGPT, Esq.

Still, I have no fear that I will be replaced anytime soon, since ChatGPT can't appear in court (yet). Nor will doctors be replaced soon, since ChatGPT can't write prescriptions (yet). But the clock is ticking.

As for me, I'm glad my clients have a reasonably reliable way to obtain a baseline dose of legal knowledge. It saves time. I needn't repeatedly explain basic concepts like it should have been in writing. My clients are arriving at appointments, realizing that their cases are more nuanced than they thought, or already convinced that their cases are dead losers and that the best strategy now is to minimize the damage.

Before AI, those uncomfortable conversations used to take hours and still leave clients unconvinced, skeptical, and sometimes distrusting. So, for me, as a lawyer, AI is improving client trust. Doctors should take notes.

AI has also let me offload work in smaller cases that don't justify high legal fees. If someone calls the office because their mechanic charged them \$4,300 to "fix" their transmission (but they still hear the raccoon). That level of damage doesn't justify a \$10,000 lawyer bill. So we suggest they try self-filing in small claims court, and using ChatGPT to walk them through it— no lawyer needed. We'll offer to review whatever ChatGPT comes up with, only billing them for one hour

instead of a dozen.

Why can't doctors do the same? If my right eye is mildly inflamed (which it is, dammit), why not just tell me to start with Grok, then spend ten minutes on the phone confirming whatever the LLM suggested actually makes sense? They could add value by helpfully suggesting an extra test to confirm it, or even (for established patients) offering a prescription. Why not integrate AI into the medical practice, instead of crying about their days being numbered?

That's where I predict all this is headed. For all their angst and self-pity, doctors' days aren't actually numbered. It's going to be great for both patients and doctors. It will change how physicians practice, a lot, but it will be much better for everybody. It will make their practices more like concierge services, and patients more like customers.

There are at least three separate but unstoppable trends forcing modern medicine — stalled in an industrial model for a century or more — to finally change. We see a skeptical, transformative regulatory environment completely occupied by MAHA. We're watching a revolution in health technology aimed at cures instead of treatments. And, from the bottom up, the democratization of health knowledge casting down the protective gates erected by medical elitism.

What a time to be alive.