

# UK general practitioners skeptical that artificial intelligence could replace them

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Artificial intelligence (AI) is poised to disrupt the world of work. In a UK-wide survey published in the journal *PLOS ONE*, Charlotte Blease, Ph.D., Postdoctoral Research Fellow and Fulbright Scholar at Beth Israel

Deaconess Medical Center (BIDMC), and colleagues investigated primary care physicians' views on AI's looming impact on health professions. When it came to predictions about the future of medicine, British GPs were generally skeptical that they could be entirely replaced by AI.

"To our knowledge this is the first national survey that explores medical professionals' opinions about how AI will impact the future of a medical specialty," said Blease, who is also a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Harvard Medical School and University College Dublin. "The results suggest a disconnection between the views of experts in medical AI and practicing physicians: the overwhelming majority of general practitioners were unconvinced about the potential for technology to replace them especially when it comes to empathetic patient care."

Blease and colleagues asked physicians about the likelihood that future technology would be able to fully replace the average GP in performing six different medical tasks: diagnostics; prognostics; evaluating when to refer patients to specialists; formulating personalized treatment plans for patients; providing empathic care; and updating patient documentation such as medical records.

About half of GPs surveyed believed it likely or very likely that AI would be able to replace them in making patient prognoses in the future. Eighty (80) percent of respondents believed it likely or very likely that future technology would be able to fully undertake duties related to patient documentation, such as updating medical records.

However, the overwhelming majority of UK GPs studied (94%) believed it was unlikely or extremely unlikely that technology will be able to provide empathic care to patients as well as or better than the average GP. Nearly seven in 10 UK GPs surveyed believed that it was unlikely or very unlikely that future technology would be able to

outperform the average GP when it came to diagnosing patients; and more than 60 percent of GPs believed it unlikely or very unlikely that technology would ever be able to replace doctors in decisions about when to refer patients to specialists, with a similar number of GPs cynical about replacement when it comes to formulating personal treatment plans for patients.

Against their general skepticism about artificial intelligence, the study found that GPs appeared optimistic that future technology could undertake certain automated tasks, such as paper work.

"Overwhelmingly, general practitioners also believed that artificial intelligence could never replace them on empathy—yet this is a skill that does not require special medical expertise," said Blease. "Our findings raise important questions about how current and future physicians integrate and harness the power of [artificial intelligence](#), which could ultimately improve the delivery of care to [patients](#)."

**More information:** Charlotte Blease et al. Computerization and the future of primary care: A survey of general practitioners in the UK, *PLOS ONE* (2018). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0207418](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0207418)

Provided by Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center

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