Does AI Respect Patient Dignity? A Critical Examination of Ethics in Digital Health

Rasit Dinc

Rasit Dinc Digital Health & AI Research

Published: January 14, 2022 | AI Diagnostics

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.17998060

Abstract

The integration of Artificial Intelligence AI into healthcare promises revolutionary advancements, from personalized medicine to enhanced diagnostic accuracy...

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into healthcare promises revolutionary advancements, from personalized medicine to enhanced diagnostic accuracy. However, as AI systems become more pervasive, a critical question emerges: **Does AI respect patient dignity?** This is not merely a philosophical query but a practical ethical challenge that digital health professionals, policymakers, and the public must address. The core tension lies in balancing the efficiency and clinical benefits of AI with the fundamental moral imperative to preserve the patient's autonomy, privacy, and inherent worth [1].

The Dual Nature of AI: Enhancing Care vs. Eroding Autonomy

AI's potential to enhance patient dignity is significant. By automating routine tasks, AI can free up clinicians to spend more meaningful time with patients, fostering a stronger human connection. Furthermore, AI-driven diagnostics and predictive models can reduce patient suffering and improve long-term outcomes, which is a key component of upholding dignity [2].

However, the very mechanisms that make AI powerful also pose threats to dignity. These threats primarily revolve around three areas:

1. **Informed Consent and Transparency:** AI often operates as a "black box," making it difficult for patients to understand how a diagnosis or treatment recommendation was reached. True informed consent requires a clear understanding of the risks and benefits, which is compromised when the decision-making process is opaque [3]. 2. **Bias and Fairness:** If AI models are trained on biased or unrepresentative datasets, they can perpetuate and amplify health inequities, leading to suboptimal care for certain demographic groups. Dignity demands equitable treatment, and biased AI directly undermines this principle [4]. 3. **Depersonalization and Dehumanization:**

Over-reliance on algorithmic decision-making can reduce a patient to a collection of data points, overlooking their unique human context, emotional state, and personal values. The use of non-humanoid interfaces is one suggested strategy to remind users that AI is a tool, not a human caregiver, thereby helping to preserve dignity [5].

Preserving Dignity Through Ethical Frameworks

To ensure AI serves humanity without compromising dignity, a robust ethical framework is essential. Leading research identifies several critical areas for intervention:

| Ethical Pillar | Implication for Patient Dignity | Practical Safeguard | | :--- | :--- | :--- | | **Autonomy** | Patient's right to self-determination and control over their data and care. | Clear, accessible mechanisms for opting out of AI-driven interventions. | | **Transparency** | Understanding how AI reaches its conclusions. | Explainable AI (XAI) models and mandatory disclosure of AI use in clinical settings. | | **Accountability** | Assigning responsibility when AI causes harm. | Clear legal and professional liability frameworks for AI-related errors. | | **Privacy** | Protection of sensitive health data used by AI. | Strong data governance, anonymization techniques, and compliance with regulations like HIPAA and GDPR. |

The challenge is not to halt the progress of AI, but to embed these ethical considerations into its design and deployment from the outset—a concept known as "designing for dignity" [6]. This approach mandates that technology development must begin with a moral commitment to human worth, ensuring that safety and efficiency do not eclipse the patient's fundamental rights.

The Path Forward: Education and Professional Insight

The future of digital health hinges on a collaborative effort between technologists, clinicians, ethicists, and patients. Education is paramount; healthcare professionals must be trained not only in using AI tools but also in recognizing and mitigating their ethical risks. Furthermore, continuous dialogue and the development of best practices are necessary to navigate this rapidly evolving landscape.

For more in-depth analysis on the intersection of technology, ethics, and the future of healthcare, the resources at www.rasitdinc.com provide expert commentary and professional insight.

References

[1] Gozum, I. E. A. (2024). Human Dignity and Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare. *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 39730882. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39730882/ [2] Laracy, J. R. (2024). Human Dignity and the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence. *The William Paterson University of New Jersey*. https://www.wpunj.edu/cosh/macs-scholars-program/assets/Ethics.pdf [3] Weiner, E. B. (2025). Ethical challenges and

evolving strategies in the integration of AI in healthcare. *BMC Medical Ethics*, 11977975. [https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11977975/] (https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11977975/) [4] Ratti, E. (2025). Ethical and social considerations of applying artificial intelligence in healthcare: a scoping review. *BMC Medical Ethics*, 10.1186/s12910-025-01198-1. [https://bmcmedethics.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12910-025-01198-1] (https://bmcmedethics.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12910-025-01198-1) [5] Kelkar, A. H. (2024). Ethical Implications and Threats to Dignity for Patients With Cancer Using Artificial Intelligence. *JCO Oncology Practice*, 10.1200/OP.23.00412. [https://ascopubs.org/doi/10.1200/OP.23.00412] (https://ascopubs.org/doi/10.1200/OP.23.00412) [6] Joseph, J. (2025). Designing for dignity: ethics of AI surveillance in older adult care. *Frontiers in Digital Health*, 10.3389/fdgth.2025.1643238. [https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/digital-health/articles/10.3389/fdgth.2025.1643238/full] (https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/digital-health/articles/10.3389/fdgth.2025.1643238/full)
