

Five Ways AI Can Transform Your Podiatry Practice Today

Get in on today's hottest trend.

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Practice Management Pearls is a regular feature that focuses on practice management issues presented by successful DPMs who are members of the American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management. The AAPP has a fifty-plus-year history of providing its member podiatrists with practice management education and resources they need to practice efficiently and profitably, through personal mentoring and sharing of knowledge. To Contact AAPP call 617-484-1930, e-mail office@aappm.org, or visit www.aappm.org.

When electronic health records were first introduced, many practitioners were hesitant about moving away from paper charts. Today, most couldn't imag-

replacing clinical judgment—it's about enhancing capabilities to provide better patient care while running more efficient practices.

Here are five areas where AI can make an immediate impact in a podiatry practice:

1. Clinical Documentation

The most immediate benefit of AI is in reducing the documentation burden. Studies show that healthcare providers spend 40-50% of their time on documentation. That's time that could be spent with patients. AI-powered documentation tools can listen to patient encounters and generate clinical notes that providers can review and edit. In some cases the AI may be built into your current EHR or may interface with it directly.

Implementation requires a sys-

fy patient demographics and ensure that clinical information is complete. The notes should use proper medical terminology while maintaining an appropriate level of detail. Most importantly, any suggested coding should be verified for accuracy.

Consider a typical clinical day. A practitioner might see 25-30 patients, spending 5-10 minutes per chart. That's potentially two hours of documentation time that could be re-directed to patient care. The time can also be used for family time, exercise, or relaxation. While providers maintain responsibility for the content of their notes, AI can draft them based on patient interactions. This isn't about letting computers make decisions—it's about letting them handle the routine typing so practitioners can focus on patient care.

2. Patient Communication

AI can help maintain contact with patients without overwhelming staff. From appointment reminders to post-procedure follow-up, AI can generate personalized communications while maintaining a human touch. The key is using AI to handle routine communications while preserving direct human interaction for more complex situations.

Certain communications naturally lend themselves to AI assistance. Appointment confirmations, routine follow-ups, and prescription refill notifications can be handled efficiently through automated systems.

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ine practicing without them. Healthcare is at a similar inflection point with artificial intelligence (AI). While there's plenty of hype around AI in and out of healthcare, there are practical AI applications that can improve podiatric practices today.

Practicing podiatrists have seen how technology can either help or hinder their ability to provide care. The key is implementing the right tools in the right ways. AI isn't about

tematic approach. Start by identifying which types of patient encounters would benefit most from AI documentation—perhaps routine follow-ups or post-operative visits. Select a small group of providers to pilot the system, ideally those who are both tech-savvy and skeptical. This balanced approach ensures thorough testing.

When evaluating AI-generated notes, train your staff to review several key elements. They should veri-

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Post-procedure care instructions can be customized based on the specific procedure performed, while patient satisfaction surveys can be timed appropriately in the care cycle.

However, practitioners must be cautious. As Dr. David Lubarsky of UC Davis Health emphasizes, “Doctors and nurses are in charge. Doctors and nurses will always be in charge of not only the decision-making, but in being the partner to the patient in the decision-making.” AI should support, not replace, meaningful patient relationships.

It’s essential to recognize when human intervention is needed. Complex medical questions, emotional or distressed patient messages, and urgent care requests should always be routed to appropriate staff members. The same goes for complicated insurance inquiries or any form of complaint or negative feedback. The goal is to enhance, not replace, human communication.

3. Scheduling Optimization

AI can analyze practice patterns to optimize scheduling. It can predict which appointment slots are most likely to have no-shows, suggest optimal scheduling patterns, and even help determine ideal staffing levels. This isn’t about letting computers control the schedule—it’s about using data intelligently to run a more efficient practice.

When implementing AI scheduling, start by analyzing historical patterns in your practice. Look for trends in no-shows, identify peak versus slow periods, and understand how different appointment types affect your daily flow. The system can learn from these patterns to suggest improvements that maintain both practice efficiency and patient satisfaction.

For larger practices, AI can coordinate complex scheduling across multiple providers and locations. It can help balance provider preferences with patient needs while maintaining appropriate coverage. For solo practitioners, it can help maximize productivity while protecting valuable personal time. The key is to let the AI suggest optimizations while main-

taining human oversight of the final schedule.

4. Billing and Revenue Cycle Management

AI excels at pattern recognition and can significantly improve billing accuracy. It can flag potential coding errors, identify missing documentation, and predict potential claim denials before submission. This means fewer rejected claims and faster reimbursement.

Real-time coding verification has become increasingly important as insurance requirements grow more complex. AI can analyze documentation as it’s created, suggesting appropriate codes and identifying potential documentation gaps before claims are submitted. The system can track prior authorizations, automate payment posting, and even predict potential denials based on historical patterns.

Implementation consideration: Any AI system handling billing, or any protected health information, must be HIPAA-compliant. This means careful vetting of any AI tools that interact with patient data.

5. Marketing and Patient Education

AI can help create consistent, accurate patient education materials and marketing content. From social media posts to patient handouts, AI can generate draft content for review. However, remember that all medical content must be verified by healthcare professionals. AI is a writing assistant, not a medical authority.

Consider using AI to draft regular patient newsletters, blog posts, and social media updates. The system can suggest topics based on seasonal trends or common patient questions. However, all content should be reviewed and edited by qualified staff to ensure medical accuracy and maintain your practice’s voice.

Implementation Considerations

Before implementing any AI tools, practitioners should consider several key factors:

- **HIPAA Compliance:** Any AI system handling patient data must meet strict security requirements.
- **Staff Training:** Develop a comprehensive training program that

builds confidence and competence over time. Start with basic concepts and gradually introduce more advanced features. Create clear protocols for error reporting and correction. Most importantly, ensure staff understands that AI is a tool to support their work, not replace their expertise.

• **Quality Control:** As Dr. Julia Adler-Milstein of UCSF emphasizes, practices need both “algorithmic vigilance and clinician vigilance.” Establish clear review processes for AI-generated content and regular system performance monitoring. Collect feedback from staff and patients to continuously improve implementation.

The Future of AI in Podiatry

AI technology is evolving rapidly, but its role in healthcare should always be supportive rather than directive. Just as practitioners wouldn’t let a computer determine a treatment plan, they shouldn’t rely solely on AI for critical decisions. However, when used appropriately, AI can help provide better care while running more efficient practices.

Remember, the goal isn’t to replace human expertise but to augment it. Clinical judgment, experience, and patient relationships remain most important. AI is simply a tool to help work more efficiently and effectively.

Practices should start small, perhaps with one area like clinical documentation or appointment reminders. Monitor results, gather feedback from staff and patients, and adjust as needed. The key is to maintain control while leveraging technology to improve practice operations and patient care.

The future of podiatry isn’t about choosing between human expertise and artificial intelligence—it’s about combining both to provide the best possible care for patients. **PM**



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