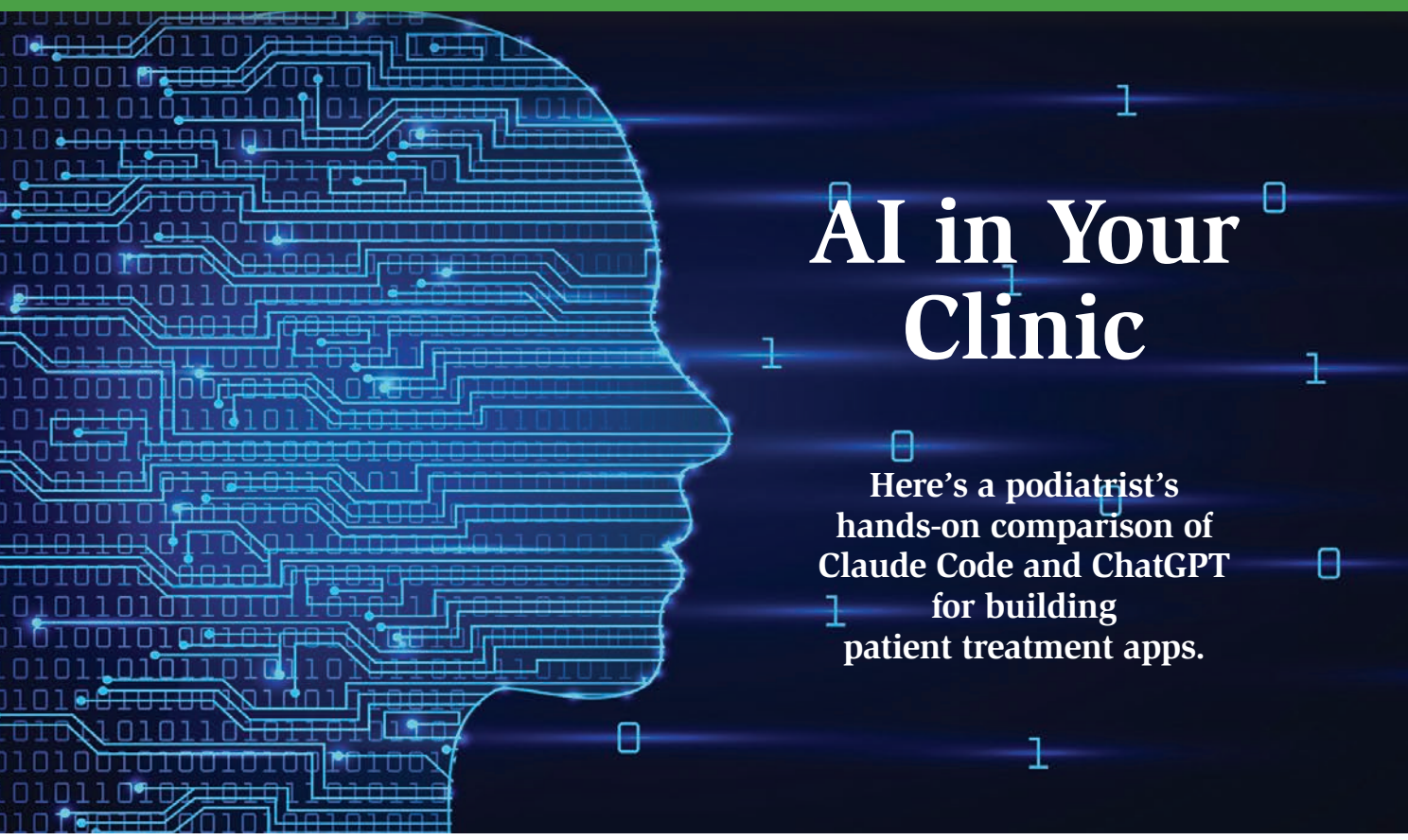

AI in Your Clinic

Here's a podiatrist's hands-on comparison of Claude Code and ChatGPT for building patient treatment apps.

BY TODD O'BRIEN, DPM

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence has been front and center in the news lately. The potential to dramatically impact many white-collar professions, including medicine, has already been heralded as the fourth Industrial Revolution. How can podiatrists take advantage of the power of these new tools to improve their practices? In my case, I have been using AI as a research tool, but for little else. This changed when I heard about AI's ability to create one's own apps without needing to learn a coding language. This idea appealed to me, as I have wanted to create personalized apps for my practice but could never afford it. I also had no desire to spend the time learning to code.

Given this background, I decided to try building my own patient treatment apps to improve patient education and compliance. After exploring the options available to "vibe code" my own apps, I settled on trying out Anthropic's Claude Code (Claude Sonnet 4.6) and OpenAI's ChatGPT (GPT 5.3). So far, I have created apps for plantar fasciitis and post-operative bunion recovery. This article offers an objective account of that experience, highlighting the strengths and limitations of each tool across four areas most relevant to practicing podiatrists: ease of use, app quality, and time and cost efficiency. My software and computer background extends to using common programs such as Microsoft Word and Adobe Photoshop, along with various Electronic Heath Record (EHR) systems.

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Ease of Use

ChatGPT operates through a conversational browser interface that is very easy to use. One can chat naturally, as you would with an actual person. You describe what you want in plain language, read the output, and refine it to suit your goals. For someone new to app development, this is a relatively simple way to start.

Claude Code operates through a "command-line" tool that works within your computer's terminal environment, not on your browser. (I used Powershell on Windows.) Getting this interface set up and working took about an hour. You will need to sign up with a third party vendor called Netlify to see the app on your

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laptop. After the set-up is done, Claude Code works extremely well. It manages files on its own and can handle multi-step tasks without much guidance, unlike ChatGPT.

Verdict: ChatGPT wins on accessibility; Claude Code wins for handling complex projects once the learning curve is overcome.

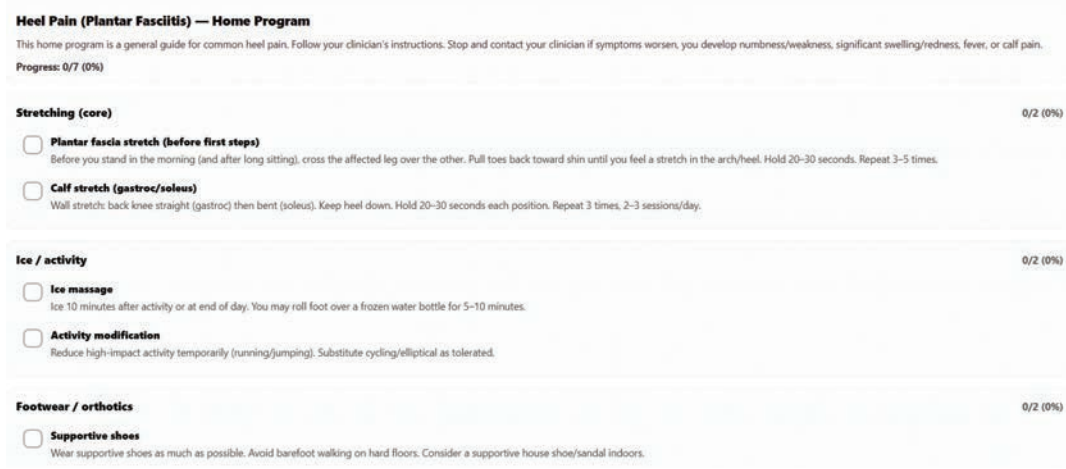

Figure 3: Screenshot OpenAI's ChatGPT Plantar Fasciitis Treatment App

Quality of the Apps Produced

Both platforms can produce functional patient apps, but the quality differs significantly between them. ChatGPT was able to generate a simple app. However, fine tuning it was difficult, requiring extensive manual input for debugging. The app also did not easily transfer to my phone. It relies on a third-party vendor app called Expo Go. After several hours of trying, I eventually gave up on getting this to transfer to the phone. This was a disappointment, as I envisioned patients scanning a QR code to seamlessly get the app. For simple documents such as a printable ankle sprain rehabilitation checklist or a diabetic foot educational handout, the output was good and required minimal editing.

For simple, low-complexity documents such as educational handouts, ChatGPT is faster.

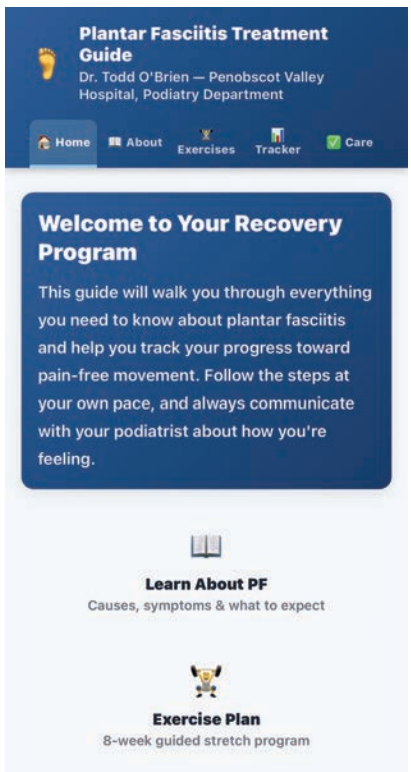

Figure 1: Screenshot from Anthropic's Claude Code Plantar Fasciitis Treatment App

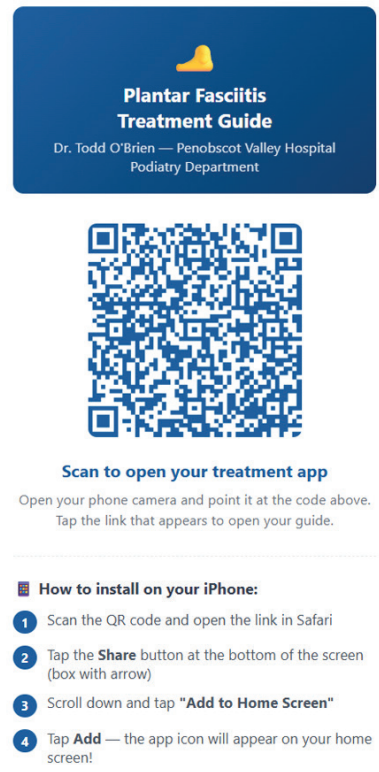

Figure 2: Patient app QR code for iPhone.

Claude Code, by contrast, built a professional-looking app with relative ease. The apps I created, including a multi-week plantar fasciitis rehabilitation tracker with symptom logging and a bunion surgery recovery guide, came out with a clean professional look. Some minor debugging was required, but nothing compared to the time I put in with ChatGPT. I spent more time getting the right graphic for the home screen icon on the phone than on the app itself. If you're not familiar with finding copyright-free or licensable images, you may want to learn more about that. I set up an account with a company called Dreamstime to obtain appropriate images. Other good options include Shutterstock and Getty Images, although these may be a little more expensive.

Verdict: ChatGPT is fine for simple documents; Claude Code can produce apps that will represent your practice in a professional manner (Figures 1, 2, 3).

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Time and Cost Efficiency

For simple, low-complexity documents such as educational handouts, ChatGPT is faster. The conversational interface makes the process quick and natural. Where it comes up short is in app development. I ended up spending more time than I wanted just to get a basic app up and running.

For larger, more complex projects, Claude Code's competence at handling tasks independently saved significant time. I could see the tasks being done by watching the screen, compared to manually helping ChatGPT do them. Best of all, Claude Code allowed me to carry on with other more important tasks without demanding my attention. I could walk away from my laptop and it would diligently plow ahead. When I checked back in, there would be a message, usually asking to approve a task. There is always the option to decline this suggestion or "chat" about it. There was also an explanation about why performing certain operations was necessary. I tended not to dwell on these, as it was often a technical point intended for actual coders.

On cost, both platforms operate on subscription models. I paid a monthly subscription fee of $20 for each service. You can always cancel after your project is completed. In theory, you could make an app for $30-40 if you include a few licensed images. Of course, this doesn't include your time.

Verdict: ChatGPT is more time efficient for simple builds; Claude Code is more efficient for more complicated projects. Costs are comparable between the two services. (Table 1).

Practical Guidance for Podiatrists

Based on this experience, the following guidance should be considered for either platform:

- Experiment with ChatGPT if you are new to AI. The interface is simple and user friendly. You will need to sign up for the lowest level paid subscription to work on building an app. If nothing else, you can use the free platform to do quick look-ups on the latest clinical guidelines and research.
- Invest in Claude Code if you intend to build more polished patient apps. There will be a steeper learning curve requiring some dedicated time in the beginning. Once setup is done, you will be able to create a custom app that would have cost thousands of dollars a few years ago.
- Both platforms require precise, thoughtfully crafted prompts to ensure the best output. This may be the most important part of your involvement in the process. The more specific you can be in your prompt, the better the fit of the output to your needs.
- You may consider involving a tech-savvy member of your staff for guidance along the way. Always consider the HIPAA and patient care implications of your app. A testing period with a trusted friend or employee is helpful in avoiding any potential pitfalls.
- Always carefully read over any of the AI-generated output for accuracy and compatibility with your practice. Changes are easy enough to make on drafts, but errors can cause trouble if retained on the final version released to patients.

Both platforms require precise, thoughtfully crafted prompts to ensure the best output.

TABLE 1

Summary Comparison

The table below summarizes the key findings across the four areas evaluated.

Category	Claude Code	ChatGPT
Learning Curve	Steeper learning curve in the beginning but a bigger payoff in the end.	Easier to get started.
App Quality	Very good quality, multi-screen app with a clean look and functionality.	Good for quick prototypes to test out ideas.
Time Efficiency	After the set up, it is much faster. You can literally walk away and let it work independently.	Faster for simple projects, not for complex ones. The need for extensive debugging was a real drawback.
Cost	$20/month	$20/month

Conclusion

AI is not likely to replace podiatrists any time soon. The procedure-based nature of our specialty will protect us from that for the time being. However, podiatry, like most healthcare professions, will have to learn to adapt to the changes AI will bring. Part of this adaptation will be learning to use AI-enabled time- and cost-saving tools. Customized patient app development is one application of this technology. What once was only available to larger institutions able to spend thousands of dollars on software development is now available to anyone for a negligible cost. This ability to create your own apps for various foot conditions will help improve patient education while simultaneously elevating the profile of your practice. The possibilities are only limited by your creativity and willingness to learn. PM

Todd O'Brien, DPM, practices podiatry full-time in Lincoln, ME. He holds an adjunct faculty appointment in the Department of Chemical and Biomedical Engineering at the University of Maine and holds six patents for medical devices. Writing credits include peer-reviewed journal articles and a guidebook on entrepreneurship for medical inventors.