AI in Podiatry: What's Actually Worth Your Time?

It only matters if it results in meaningful improvements.

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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. Visit www.aappm.org for more information.

If you're seeing 30 or more patients a day and still finishing notes at night, you're not doing anything wrong. You're just practicing podiatry in 2026.

Most private-practice podiatrists are dealing with the same pressures: increasing documentation demands, ongoing staffing challenges, higher patient expectations, and workdays that rarely end when clinic hours do. The technology around us keeps improving, but the daily workload hasn't gotten any lighter.

That's why AI keeps coming up in conversations. Some of it is hype. Some of it isn't ready. But some of it—quietly—is already helping practices function better without changing how they practice medicine. This isn't about replacing doctors or turning your office into a tech experiment. It's about reducing friction in the parts of the day that wear you down the most.

Resetting Expectations About AI

AI isn't here to practice medicine for you. In practical terms, it's software designed to handle repetitive tasks and recognize patterns at a scale humans simply can't. When implemented well, it doesn't feel disruptive or complicated. It feels like work disappearing from your plate. The goal isn't to be innovative for innovation's sake. The goal is to stop charting late at night and reclaim some control over your schedule.

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Documentation: The Obvious Place to Start

For most podiatrists, documentation is the clearest starting point. AI medical scribes listen during patient visits and draft clinical notes automatically. You conduct the visit the same way you always have. The system creates a note in the background. You review it, make edits, and sign. That's the entire workflow.

When these tools work well, the benefits are noticeable almost immediately. Doctors report less typing during visits, more complete notes, and far fewer hours spent charting after clinic. Many also notice improved patient interactions simply because they're no longer staring at a screen.

Writing a typical SOAP note, AI scribes tend to perform best with the subjective and plan sections. They capture the patient's story in their own words and structure the visit cleanly. They aren't flawless. Coding still requires review. Objective findings depend on how clearly you narrate your exam. And you'll still edit notes. But editing a draft is very different from building every note from scratch at the end of a long day. For many podiatrists, this is the first change that meaningfully reduces after-hours work.

Why AI Scribes Are Different from Human Scribes

Human scribes can be excellent, but they come with challenges. Hiring, training, turnover, and cost are constant considerations, especially in smaller practices.

AI scribes don't require onboarding, don't leave unexpectedly, and don't need re-training every few months. Once you adjust to narrat-

Continued on page 36

Time (from page 35)

ing parts of your exam, the system adapts to your style and workflow. Most doctors who commit to using one consistently say the same thing: they wouldn't want to go back.

Patient Messages: The Quiet Time Drain

Patient messages rarely feel overwhelming in the moment. Over the course of a day, though, they add up quickly. Prescription refills, post-procedure questions, photos asking "Is this normal?"—each one pulls your attention away from whatever you're doing. Taken together, they stretch the workday well past clinic hours.

AI-assisted communication tools help by drafting responses based on your previous replies and preferences. You still review everything. You still control what goes out. But you're no longer rewriting the same responses repeatedly. Over time, these systems also help with message triage. Urgent concerns get flagged. Routine questions are grouped. Follow-ups become more consistent instead of improvised. Doctors often find that response times improve significantly, and just as importantly, mental fatigue decreases.

Smarter Scheduling Without More Phone Calls

Scheduling is another area where small inefficiencies create constant stress.

AI-enabled scheduling platforms allow patients to book, cancel, or reschedule appointments online at any time. Automated reminders reduce no-shows, and predictive tools can identify patients more likely to miss appointments.

For the practice, this means fewer phone calls, better schedule flow, and less scrambling to fill gaps. Front desk staff spend less time managing logistics and more time helping patients in front of them. This technology doesn't replace your team. It supports them.

Patient Education That Actually Makes Sense

Most podiatrists explain conditions and treatment plans clearly in person. The challenge is giving patients written instructions they can actually understand and follow at home. Traditional handouts often miss the mark, either because they're too generic or too technical.

AI helps translate your explanations into plain language. It can automatically adjust reading level, customize instructions by diagnosis, and generate materials in multiple languages. Clear instructions improve compliance and reduce follow-up calls asking for clarification. That saves time for both you and your staff while improving outcomes.

The Financial Reality

The return on investment for many AI tools is straightforward. Saving even one hour a day on documentation adds up quickly. Fewer no-shows translate directly into recovered revenue. Freeing staff time allows your team to focus on higher-value tasks.

Many practices see measurable financial benefits within months. Beyond that, reduced burnout and improved work-life balance are harder to quantify but just as important.

Compliance Is Not Optional

Any AI tool that touches patient data and protected health information must be HIPAA-compliant. Consumer AI platforms and free tools are not appropriate for clinical use. Before adopting any system, confirm compliance, review security documentation, and ensure a Business Associate Agreement (BAA) is in place. Understand how data is stored, protected, and accessed. AI should always support—not replace—clinical judgment. Human oversight remains essential.

Staff Adoption Determines Success

Technology only works if people use it. Successful implementation depends on staff education and buy-in. Involve your team early, address concerns openly, and invest in training. Starting with tech-comfortable staff members often helps build momentum.

Once staff experience reduced workload and smoother workflows, resistance typically fades.

What Comes Next

Over the next several years, AI will expand into areas like gait analysis, wound monitoring, and surgical planning. Some of these tools will be transformative. Others will fall short. The practices best positioned for what's coming won't be the ones chasing every new product. They'll be the ones that already know how to evaluate and integrate technology thoughtfully. That process starts with small, practical steps.

The Takeaway

AI isn't about the future of podiatry. It's about the reality of practice today.

If one tool helps you finish notes earlier, respond to messages faster, or make your schedule run more smoothly, that's a meaningful improvement. If you take one action after reading this, make it simple: identify the single biggest drain on your day and explore one solution for it. AI should not be used to make life innovative but to make life sustainable…and that's what really matters. PM

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Andrew Schneider, DPM, is President of the American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management (AAPPM).