Artificial Intelligence: Is it a new era in payer decision making?

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BACKGROUND

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming the healthcare sector, enabling more efficient and accurate data analysis for strategic decision-making. However, this integration faces challenges such as establishing AI strategies, data governance, and security of patients' health information [1]. Although recent AI advancements have introduced novel approaches for evidence generation [2], we believe the future possibilities and scope of opportunities offered by AI will be dependent upon decision-makers' willingness to rely on evidence that is generated by AI-based methods.

OBJECTIVES

This research explores payer perspectives on the opportunities and challenges of incorporating Al technologies in healthcare decision-making. It also offers an insight into how the adoption of Al technologies can enhance operational effectiveness and decision-making procedures in the healthcare industry, and pinpoints the therapeutic areas perceived to hold the highest utility for Al application. In addition, the research examines the extent of acceptance among payers for evidence produced by Al-driven methods and anticipates their likely future tendencies.

METHODS

Ipsos fielded an online survey, in June 2024, and received responses from 21 payers who are currently part of Ipsos' payer panel (in Canada, CA (n=2), France, FR (n=1), Germany, DE (n=3), Italy, IT (n=3), Spain, ES (n=5), UK (=1), US (n=3) and other EU countries ((Portugal, PT (n=1), Belgium, BE (n=1) and Denmark, DK (n=1))

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RESULTS

Overall, the payers considered incorporation of AI in their processes as a positive prospect, improving operational efficiency by helping with the analysis of healthcare systems data, evaluation of comparative effectiveness of intervention, and evidence synthesis. The key anticipated benefits included saving time in evidence synthesis and improving post-launch monitoring and real-world evidence collection.

Attitudes towards the integration of AI technology in the near-term (1-3 years) varied across different markets and the majority in EU countries did not anticipate its use in the near future. The US payers were the most inclined towards AI adoption, whereas the DE payers displayed the most reluctance, suggesting a more cautious and sceptical perspective on the potential benefits of AI technology.

The application and appreciation of AI technologies and methods were predominantly noticeable in rapidly changing fields, for example, oncology, and in areas with a wealth of evidence and uncertainties in long-term outcomes, such as chronic diseases. Payers from DE and FR specifically recognised the significance of AI in the field of vaccines, where it can assist in complex economic modelling and forecasting the population impact.

The results suggest a division in the perception and acceptance of Al-based methods for evidence generation among decision-makers. Half demonstrated a lack of openness, while the other half exhibited some, or a good level of, openness.

Benefits to adopting and implementing AI in the decision-making process



Awareness and openness to rely on Al-based methods for evidence generation



Challenges in adopting and implementing AI in the decision-making process



Lack of transparency in Al algorithms, questions around data reliability, validity, and accuracy, and the absence of guiding regulatory frameworks for Al use were the top three challenges highlighted by payers globally. Smaller EU markets (PT, BE, DK), DE, and ES also highlighted gaps in knowledge and skills for applying Al based technologies.

There was a stronger belief in IT, FR, and smaller EU markets (PT, BE, DK) that the acceptance of Al-generated evidence will increase as technology advances and becomes more reliable. Most payers anticipated the acceptance of Al-generated evidence to be context-dependent in the future, varying based on the specific situation or field of application.

CONCLUSIONS

Our research indicates that payers are hesitant to integrate AI technologies, primarily due to concerns about the transparency and reliability of AI algorithms and data, and the lack of regulatory frameworks and access to patient data. While pharmaceutical companies are increasingly adopting AI, payers may remain cautious. The challenge lies in addressing these concerns and establishing agreement on acceptable AI applications. While there are challenges to overcome, the potential benefits are substantial, and we hold the belief that payers' recognition and acceptance of these benefits will grow, particularly in specific areas of AI usage where they place greater trust in AI. Recommendations to address the outstanding challenges include the creation and application of secure data storage systems, along with the establishment of training initiatives to ensure payers are adequately skilled to use AI tools within their processes effectively. Further research, development, and active collaboration between stakeholders will be crucial for realising the full potential of AI in transforming healthcare.

REFERENCES

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