

South Florida Hospital News[®] and HEALTHCARE REPORT

THE REGION'S MONTHLY NEWSPAPER FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS & PHYSICIANS

The Challenge of Keeping Healthcare Human in the AI Era

BY VANESSA ORR

Artificial intelligence in healthcare is embedded in everything from recruiting and marketing to clinical documentation, operational workflows, and patient engagement. Given its rapid adoption, it is imperative that healthcare leaders ensure AI use remains accountable, ethical, and aligned with the values that define quality care.

As a ministry of the Archdiocese of Miami serving South Florida families for 40 years, Catholic Health Services (CHS) believes that technology should enhance human care—not replace it. To this end, CHS President and CEO Mary Jo Frick recently initiated a review of the organization's AI governance framework and policy.

"The patient is a person, not a number in a bed, and it's important that we remember that," Frick said, noting that she was inspired by Pope Leo XIV's recent encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*, which calls for leaders to safeguard human dignity in the age of artificial intelligence. "While we need to spend time teaching staff about technology, we also need to remind them how to walk into the room and address the patient and listen to what they have to say.

"I am concerned that relying on this level of automation could remove much of the personal touch. If you rely completely on AI, you're simply working with a computer," she added. "AI cannot take the place of what you learn when you're physically taking care of a patient and users need to be able to make this distinction."

While AI can be useful for making treatment recommendations and suggesting alternatives that caregivers may not have considered, Frick doesn't believe that AI should ever influence clinical recommendations without meaningful human oversight.

"While AI is great to analyze lab results or to suggest a course of treatment for physical therapy, the physical therapists at our specialty rehab hospital need to look at those suggestions and adapt them to the patient in front of them," she said.

Frick also believes that patients should be informed when AI is being used in their care, especially when it contributes to a healthcare decision.

While some organizations may also use AI to make hiring decisions or for resource allocation, Frick doesn't believe that it provides the emotional feedback needed to fit the right person with the right job. "During the hiring process, you need to see if the



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person has the warmth and personality needed to work with patients," she said.

Other drawbacks may include algorithmic bias that could deepen existing disparities rather than improving health equity. To this end, it's important that companies using AI or purchasing a new EHR (electronic health record) system test the product thoroughly before adopting the technology.

"You want to understand what algorithms the technology is producing; it could be so technological that it is leaving the patient out of it," said Frick. "Before adopting any new technology, test it thoroughly to make sure that the outcomes you see equal what physicians, nurses and the therapy staff see in person with the same patient."

While technology companies need to ensure that they've taken into account the basic principles of patient care, it is still the responsibility of healthcare providers to make sure that any new technology, including AI, follows organizational policies. In the case of CHS, new technology is reviewed by the board and its Ethics Committee, Chief Medical Officer Brian J. Kiedrowski, MD, and the archdiocese staff to ensure that the archbishop is aware of and in favor of whatever technology is adopted.

"The archbishop is the corporate soul of our board, and everything we do at CHS is accountable to him," said Frick.

CHS is currently in the process of deciding on a new EHR system, and is encouraging its staff to provide input on the new technology to ensure that patient care remains paramount.

"We've had them show us nursing notes, and our nurses have questioned if they can be adapted on an individual patient basis among other concerns," said Frick. "Then we'll go through more testing to make sure that what is adopted is not only what's best for the bottom line, but best for our patients from an ethical perspective.

"We want AI to help our staff think outside the box, but we don't want it to take the place of their own personalized work," she added. "It still comes back to training nurses to make sure that they are using AI as a tool and providing patients with that personal touch."

For more information, visit CatholicHealthServices.org or call (954) 484-1515.