Know Your Benefits

Assessing the Viability of AI as a Self-diagnosis Tool

Artificial intelligence (AI) has created revolutionary advances across many industries. Now, it's paving its way as a tool to self-diagnose medical conditions or get answers to health-related questions. Self-diagnosis is a growing practice, as people's primary access point for health care information has shifted from professionals to the internet. Especially when you're having trouble getting an appointment, the internet has proven itself as a fast, easily accessible and free source of information. Given the internet's popularity in answering some of your most urgent health-related questions, you may wonder how AI can help. Keep in mind that while AI is new and exciting, it's not a replacement for professional health care.

This article explores the use of generative AI for medical self-diagnosis and its benefits, limitations and viability.

Generative AI for Health Care

Generative AI is a type of technology that produces text, images, audio or other content. With the introduction of AI chatbots, more people may be turning to them to answer their health-related questions. Some common tools used for this purpose include OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Med-PaLM. These types of large language model (LLM) chatbots can predict the next word in a sequence to answer questions in a human-like style.

Amid a shortage of health care workers, bots could help answer your questions. Initial tests by researchers so far suggest these AI programs are more accurate than a standard Google search.

The Pros

AI tools can potentially reduce medical costs for patients and health care providers. Here are some more potential benefits of using generative AI for medical self-diagnosis:

- Increased accessibility
- Quicker triaging
- Boosted health literacy
- Preserved anonymity

All of these factors contribute to an enhanced patient experience and improved engagement. Chatbots are also considered easier to use than online symptom checkers.

The Cons

While generative AI has great potential, it's important to understand that there are also some limitations and pitfalls, including the following:

- False information
- Misinterpretation of information
- Ethical concerns (e.g., data privacy and bias)
- Risk of ignoring medical advice

Due to these risks, some LLM chatbots include disclaimers that they shouldn't be used to diagnose serious conditions, provide instructions for curing conditions or manage life-threatening issues.

Using Generative AI in Medical Self-diagnosis

While generative AI tools may help you quickly answer health-related questions and self-diagnosis conditions, relying solely on them could be unsafe. Similar to their use in other applications, AI tools are meant to be complimentary and an additional source of information. They are great sources for general information and help simplify it so you can be an educated health care consumer.

Generative AI is not a replacement for medical advice from a professional, but it can be used to supplement professional medical advice. If you plan to use AI to answer your nonurgent health-related questions, consider the following best practices:

- Be aware of the potential ethical concerns of AI-driven health care, such as data privacy.

- Verify the AI information with trusted medical sources.

- Consult a health care professional for conclusive diagnoses and treatment plans.

The Future of AI-assisted Self-diagnosis

According to data from business consultant Accenture, health care AI applications could save up to $150 billion annually for the U.S. health care economy by 2026. AI offers numerous potential benefits, but it's important to recognize the limitations and concerns associated with medical self-diagnosis. Health care providers will likely strive to harness AI's power instead of solely relying on it. By layering AI into health care systems and making them user-friendly, providers can gain access to insights to provide better care.

AI is in the early stages of its development. However, as it advances, the future of medical self-diagnosis will likely involve even greater collaboration between AI developers and health care providers.

Summary

In today's digital world, it's easy to become overwhelmed when researching health-related information. Obtaining accurate health advice and information comes down to using all available sources but understanding their limitations. LLM chatbots could take provider-AI collaboration and diagnosis to the next level, but it has yet to be seen.

While generative AI is not meant to replace professional health care, it can be a good supplementary source and help you increase your health literacy and get answers quicker. Contact your doctor for the most accurate and personalized health care information and guidance.