Case study

Developing AI training for NHS Staff and why patient and public involvement is important

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This case study explores the importance of developing comprehensive education and training for National Health Service (NHS) staff working with Artifical Intelligence (AI). We spoke to a Consultant Radiologist working at an NHS Trust, who was interested in the use of AI technology to help clinicians triage and prioritise breast and chest x-ray scans. They explained to us the importance of giving healthcare professions the knowledge and skills to navigate the integration of AI into their daily practices, as well as the necessity of being able to speak to patients and the public openly about the use of AI within the hospital or as part of their care.

The technology

There is a national shortage of radiologists, and record waiting times for cancer treatments. AI technologies that are 'trained' to look at scans are developed to 'assess' whether abnormalities in the scans matter. These AI technologies have the potential to help radiologists by highlighting the more urgent cases to look at, so the radiologist can prioritise the patients in most need of care, to get them access to treatment more quickly.

Staff training

The Consultant Radiologist took proactive measures by creating a tailored AI education package for all healthcare workers that were expected to work with AI tools. The education package, created in conjunction with the British Institute of Radiology, was designed to encourage active participation in the AI integration process, and to make sure staff felt comfortable with the AI technology. By ensuring that healthcare workers understood the fundamental technical and ethical principles surrounding AI, the initiative aimed to prevent individuals from feeling overwhelmed or out of their depth when working with AI tools. This inclusivity is vital to encourage a positive attitude toward AI adoption. They told us:

> "People feel quite out of their depth if you don't know about AI, you don't know any of the parameters. You do have to have a certain basic level of AI education so that you are part of the process, you don't feel like, you know it's being pushed on you, because otherwise people step away. If they don't have to work with the AI, they won't, but we need them to slowly but surely get comfortable."

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Funding from Health Education England (HEE) helped to make the education package accessible. This allowed any interested healthcare professionals to register and familiarise themselves with the basic concepts of AI, such as ethics and governance, so that they are more comfortable working with AI. You can find this training package here.

You can also find more information across the AIDRS website. Read our best practice guidance for adopters on General staff training and product-specific user training for digital healthcare technologies, and our case study from Articulate Pro on Establishing Healthcare Worker's Confidence in AI.

Public involvement

The Consultant Radiologist explained to us the process of engaging with her patient population through their Governor's Meeting, which patients can attend. Breast cancer charities and Macmillan nurses would also be in attendance, as well as Trust executives and managers. Presentations were made during Governor's Meetings, which served as a platform for two-way engagement, ensuring that patients were not only informed about the use of AI at the Trust, but had the opportunity to express any concerns and expectations.

Transparant communication

To make information accessible to patients and the public, the team used various communication channels. Posters were strategically placed in mammogram rooms and waiting areas, creating awareness among patients about the ongoing AI projects that were happening on site. Additionally, the Annual Trust Magazine featured updates on AI projects, reaching a wider readership and promoting transparency.

Talking to patients

Clear and honest communication to patients about the role of AI in the Trust was important to the Consultant Radiologist, to reassure patients and the public that AI tools were intended to augment the work of clinicians, not replace them. Acknowledging the concerns that patients may have was very important. The Consultant Radiologist told us:

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> “We tell patients how we're setting up the AI pilot studies, why we're doing them, and the mechanisms we put in place so that we’re not just assuming that AI will solve all the problems. It was very important to explain that clinicians are working alongside the AI. I find the patients are quite receptive. At any point if you start talking about replacing a clinician, then people don't like it because they want the clinician to be involved, but they know the potential of AI to really help the clinician augment their work.”

Read our blog from the HRA on why public involvement in research is important, and why public involvement matters. For more information from the HRA on how to involve patients and the public in research, visit our website: Public Involvement - Health Research Authority (hra.nhs.uk) Or subscribe to our public involvement newsletter here.

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