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Cloud Solutions

3 Reasons Healthcare Systems Should Invest in AI Technology Now

TABLE
OF CONTENTS

The Business Case for Implementing AI to Reduce Administrative Burden

As industry experts speculate on the "someday potential" for physicians to leverage generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) to ask for guidance on patient cases and treatment, those solutions are not yet available. However, new AI solutions to relieve administrative burden, one of the biggest pain points for physicians and clinicians, are available now.

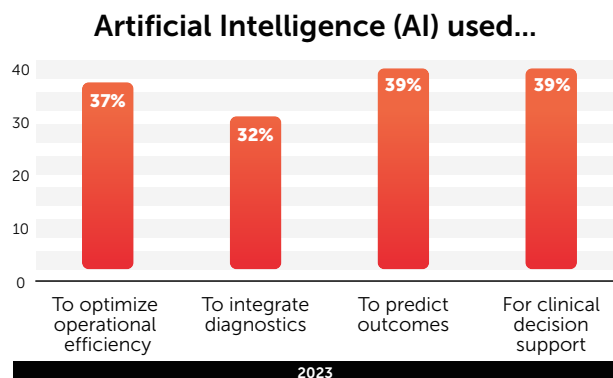Too often when we think about natural language processing (NLP) and AI in healthcare, we imagine everything from diagnostics to population health and research. But applying NLP and AI to written or unstructured documentation, such as intake forms, treatment approvals, and referrals, offers the intelligence needed to deliver the right care at the right time, when it counts. It's a "right now" solution to help providers deliver faster patient treatment.

Applying AI to improve the transfer of information makes good business sense. Below you'll find **3 reasons to implement AI now, and what to consider when evaluating AI investments.**

Reason No. 1: AI relieves pressure on overstretched healthcare teams, increasing capacity where it matters most.

At a time when **37% of healthcare leaders** plan to invest in AI to strengthen operational efficiency, NLP combined with AI can modernize and improve the transfer of information to reduce pressure on healthcare teams.

How Healthcare Leaders Plan to Invest in AI Over the Next 3 Years

Artificial Intelligence (AI) used...

37%	32%	39%	39%
To optimize operational efficiency	To integrate diagnostics	To predict outcomes	For clinical decision support

2023

Source: *Future Healthcare Index 2023: Taking Healthcare Everywhere*, Philips, April 2023.

Health systems spend a significant amount of time moving data. When nurses hit a point of friction in their workflow—for instance, when they can't find the information for a patient referral, even after it has been inputted into the system by another team member—their response is to type in the information themselves. This takes time away from patient care, and it's particularly concerning now, when the United States faces a clinical workforce shortage, the likes of which the country has rarely seen. It also results in workflow inefficiencies and clinical communication delays, while increasing the potential for errors and duplication of work.

The Cost of Breakdowns in Information Transfer for Nurses

43 minutes a day
Time nurses spend hunting for information, equipment, supplies, medication or individuals during a 12-hour shift, according to a **2023 McKinsey survey**. Ideally, nurses say they would spend 21.5 minutes or less per 12-hour shift on these activities.

60 minutes per day
Amount of time spent **communicating about patient care** for care coordination and handoff during a shift.

97 minutes per day
Time nurses spend on **administrative and logistical tasks**, patient transfer and transport times, time waiting and similar activities during a shift.

Total time-per-day that nurses spend on manual tasks that could be eliminated by NLP AI technology:

2.4 days per week

45 Percent of inpatient nurses say they are **likely to leave their role** in the next six months, in part due to an unmanageable workload.

Given the staffing crisis health systems currently face, with an **anticipated shortage of 200,000 to 450,000 nurses** alone by 2025, reducing ineffective and redundant workflows is crucial. It's an area where NLP and AI holds strong potential to make a difference in improving nurse workload and their ability to manage patients requiring complex care. In fact, nurses believe 42% of the time they spend per shift could be **reduced by nearly half** through tech-enabled processes, including the use of intelligent automation.

But relieving the impact of staffing shortages through NLP, AI and automation solutions, requires an approach that delivers the right information to the right clinicians at the right time. "We can't just continue to move the needle when it comes to automation. We have to think about how we're delivering that process," stated Nick Stupakis, vice president, Helion, during a HIMSS 2023 panel session. To get there, providers must possess the ability to automate redundant processes no matter where they begin. They also need to be able to extract data in a consumable way directly, within their everyday workflows.

Critical areas for AI investment: Solutions that modernize and improve the transfer of information to reduce pressure on healthcare teams. These include tools that transform handwritten or text data into a structure that can be consumed by any IT system—including the EHR—and conveyed to staff in ways that complement their workflow.

Consider this potential scenario (presented by Consensus in the HIMSS23 interoperability showcase): Walter is a 45-year-old male, whose dentist, during a routine check-up, detected unusual changes in his upper right jaw that could foreshadow early stage cancer. Walter's dentist wants him to be seen by an oral surgeon at Memorial Hospital, but he doesn't tell Walter why, since the dentist is not an oral surgeon that can do this diagnosis. Instead, he prints out a document with images from Walter's X-rays, circles the areas of concern, and asks Walter to share the document with an oral surgeon.

This fictional scenario depicts a common process that leads to critical breakdowns in communication and delays in care delivery. The chances of the images and clinical data being delivered to the specialist in a timely manner decrease the moment it's handed off in paper form to the patient. And, since Walter's dental staff are feeling the impact of workforce shortages and higher post-pandemic volumes, their capacity and available time to ensure Walter made his surgical appointment is diminished.

Now imagine that Walter's dentist can send the referral via digital cloud fax to the oral surgeon. NLP, when combined with AI, can transform a digital cloud fax into critical patient data. It can convert a handwritten form into structured data and even change the structure of the message itself so it is organized into specific clinical fields, such as a C-CDA or USCDI data set. This makes it easy for the data

to be ingested into another provider's EHR. It also empowers clinicians in other settings to determine the chief concerns of the primary, or previous clinician, at a glance, with the referral documentation. This means the next steps can happen fast and the patient's care is accelerated. Taken a step further, other workflow enhancements can be integrated resulting in even faster patient care—like electronic signature tools, robotic process automation (RPA) technology, and an integration platform—to streamline processes across care settings.

By investing in AI for operational efficiency, healthcare providers gain the ability to eliminate manual data input and reduce administrative pain points for clinical staff. This relieves and mitigates the potential for burnout, while enabling faster decision-making processes and improving access to care.

> *By investing in AI for operational efficiency, healthcare providers can **eliminate administrative pain points and reduce burnout, while improving quality of care.***

Reason No. 2: AI speeds access to actionable intelligence, strengthening quality of care and patient satisfaction, especially during transitions of care.

The handoff of patients from one care setting to another is one of the most difficult challenges providers face. It's also the point at which the potential for error dramatically increases, especially as the <u>volume of high-acuity referrals</u> for post-acute care rises, leading to more complex cases.

Yet even in the run up to the "<u>silver tsunami</u>," most skilled nursing facilities and post-acute care facilities lack meaningful connectivity with their referral partners—typically hospitals and health systems. More than half say they sometimes or
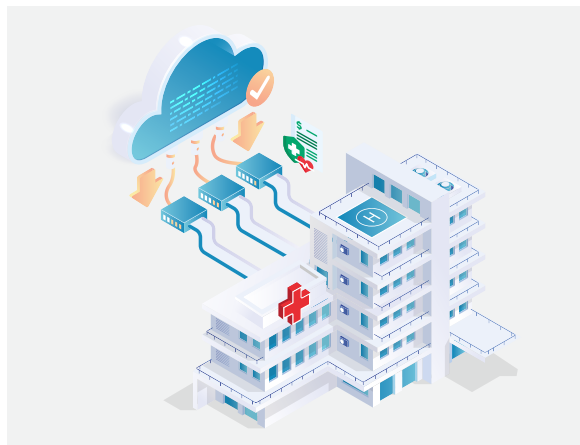
often receive patient information ***after* the patient is in their care**. Even when the information does arrive, 76% say at least a portion of the data isn't usable or it's incomplete. This not only delays admissions, but also prevents patients from receiving critically needed care.

These scenarios can lead to heartbreaking consequences for patients. This past March, a patient with metastatic cancer, who had chosen to stop treatment, arrived at a skilled nursing facility on a Friday afternoon, but the paper-based packet of discharge orders didn't contain instructions for hospice care. Because hospice care wasn't arranged in advance and couldn't be coordinated late that afternoon, the patient didn't receive needed pain medication throughout the entire weekend, causing immense suffering for the patient and family.

"I can't give them the help that they need because [the industry operates] with paper and envelopes that are hand-delivered, and when I ask for a copy of that discharge packet, no one knows how to get it to me," patient advocate Grace Cordovano **shared in an emotional post** that weekend. "We need a hospice order now, but everything's closed. It's just not fair. And it shouldn't be this hard, not when you're dying of cancer."

It's a real-life example of what can go wrong when care information isn't available in an easily digestible form at the point of admission.

Staffing shortages alone make it imperative that team members can quickly translate the information on intake forms into next steps for care. It's an area where NLP and AI can speed information transfer and make it meaningful for staff and clinicians, resulting in better care experiences for all.

Critical areas for AI investment: AI-powered digital solutions that speed information transfer will positively impact staff, clinicians and patients alike. With 70% of healthcare organizations **still relying on paper faxes** to exchange patient data, information handoffs for post-acute care **remain inconsistent**, and a health system's EHR may not be compatible with the skilled nursing facility's platform. That's why the right NLP and AI solution should include digital cloud fax technology and a powerful integration engine, so that data can be exchanged between disparate platforms (or systems). It should also possess the ability to continuously learn from the data it ingests, so that staff can detect and flag patterns in patients' health and respond effectively.

Start with digital fax.
Digital cloud fax solutions can be combined with NLP AI technology to flag specific actions needed—such as orders for hospice care—and prompt post-acute staff to respond using alerts in their everyday workflows. Since printed paper discharge plans **may be up to four inches thick**, digital cloud fax solutions help centralize the intake process, increasing efficiency despite limited staff.
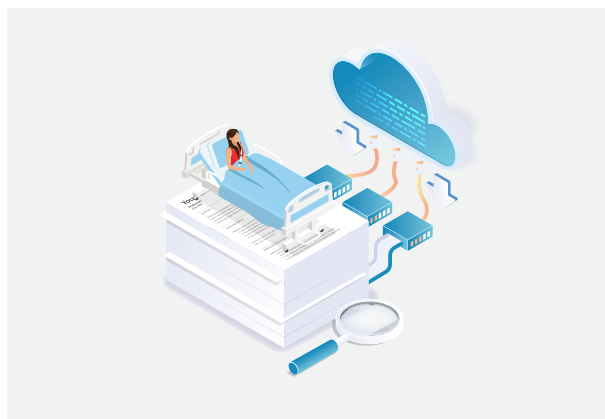
> *NLP and AI can speed information transfer, resulting in better care experiences for clinicians, staff and patients.*

When combined with an integration engine, NLP and AI solutions also speed access to actionable intelligence by eliminating the need for staff to hunt for data or perform ineffective searches on a PDF. One common example is when different terms are used to describe the same data, e.g.: when a patient's "birthdate" fails to recover a value because "date of birth" is the term used. With NLP and AI, the system knows that these terms mean the same thing—and it can apply this knowledge to both handwritten information and text. "Ultimately, the goal is to automate workflows no matter how they start and extract data in an easily consumable way without forcing clinicians to adapt to a new model," stated Frank Toscano, Consensus' VP of Technology, during a HIMSS 2023 panel session.

Further, AI systems never get tired from completing the same action over and over; therefore, the use of NLP and AI in a post-acute setting reduces the risk of mistakes that human data entry can cause. It also increases clinicians' mental capacity for knowledge intake and transfer so they can provide better care with lower risk of burnout.

Reason No. 3: NLP and AI improves referral processes throughout the continuum of care.

When physicians like Walter's make a referral to a specialist, the latest tech advancements ensure that no one worries about what will happen to their paper fax. That's because new NLP and AI solutions, when applied to digital faxes, can transform unstructured documents into structured, searchable data that EHR applications can digest. Then, using an integration engine, the structured data is automatically matched to the right patient's record so providers can act on the information.

It's an approach that works even when a low-quality digital fax is transmitted. As a result, referral workflows no longer take hours, days or weeks. The information looks exactly like a clinician or staff member would expect in a common data format, facilitating faster referrals for specialty care and better touchpoints for patients.

"Capabilities like these put providers on another plane," says Bronwen Huron, BSN, RN, MS, senior healthcare product manager, Consensus Cloud Solutions. "They help build stronger relationships with referral partners because all the information they need is routed in their preferred workflows and in a structured format—and that makes a huge difference."
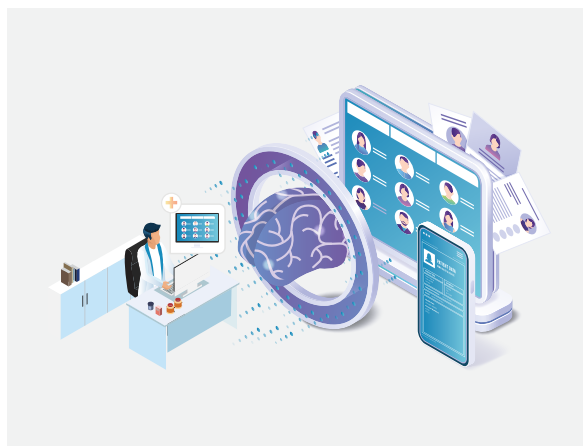
Pair NLP and AI solutions with integration technology that supports all the latest standards for connectivity.

In the move toward data interoperability in healthcare, this type of investment enables providers to convert information from an HL7 or FHIR message to a PDF that can be faxed to care settings that don't support FHIR, like post-acute care facilities, federally qualified health centers and home health. Alternatively, a digital fax can be converted to an HL7 or FHIR message if the receiving end needs that structured data.

It also addresses a wide range of interoperability challenges, from the simple to the complex. Patient care rarely begins and ends within the four walls of a hospital. Especially as we are discharging patients with higher acuity. As the need to share patient data securely and seamlessly with stakeholders across the continuum of care increases, the right integration engine empowers providers to improve coordination and communication with referral partners and other physicians. It also creates a better user experience for clinicians, helping care teams to receive and process data quickly so that they can provide high-quality patient care as soon as possible. This combined solution further streamlines communication, optimizing the use of resources across care settings, while enabling faster care and better health outcomes.

> *More healthcare organizations are turning to NLP-and AI-powered technologies to **accelerate communications and strengthen interoperability.***

Securing ROI from AI Investments

When it comes to making NLP and AI investments in healthcare, ROI is a top-of-mind consideration in determining the right technology partner. That's especially true as healthcare organizations continue to navigate through a post-pandemic, inflation-tinged environment, which struggles with limited resources and overworked staff. One recent survey found 30% of healthcare leaders want proof of improved outcomes or cost-effectiveness when investing in new technologies.

As providers anticipate leaning into tech partnerships for AI value, it's important to:

- Consider the vendor's depth of experience in healthcare technology and healthcare machine learning.

- Create clear KPIs that define your goal to be achieved with your AI partner.

- Measure the current process and then the improvement you expect to see.

- Integrate the AI solution into the workflow you expect to change. All too often, systems don't change the workflow necessary to maximize the technology.

- Understand your organization's short-term and long-term strategy for AI investment: What are the "need to haves" versus the "nice to haves"? With operational workflow challenges, the use cases can be endless. Define your goals now, measure success and scale to other use cases.

A Smarter Foundation for Care Collaboration and Decision-Making

Better care starts with better data and better support at each stage of the care continuum. Today, more than one out of four health systems want tools that support timelier and smarter data sharing and the ability to effectively integrate data across systems and platforms. By making the right choices for AI investment, leaders can create a foundation for decision-making and collaboration that improves the care experience for clinicians and patients alike.

About Consensus Cloud Solutions

Consensus Cloud Solutions, Inc. (NASDAQ: CCSI) is the world's largest digital fax provider and a trusted global source for the transformation, enhancement and secure exchange of digital information. We leverage our 25-year history of success by providing advanced data transformation solutions for regulated industries such as healthcare, finance, legal, insurance, real estate and manufacturing, as well as technology for the state and federal government. Our solutions consist of cloud faxing; digital signature; interoperability; intelligent data extraction using natural language processing and artificial intelligence; robotic process automation; and workflow enhancement. For healthcare providers, we also offer a powerful integration platform that connects Consensus' products to EHR solutions, legacy systems, and other cloud applications. Our solutions can be combined with managed services for optimal outcomes. For more information about Consensus, visit **consensus.com** and follow **@ConsensusCS** on Twitter to learn more.

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