Viewpoint: AI gets 'B-minus at best' for dealing with COVID-19. But better days are ahead

Truth be told, AI has not had a particularly successful four months in the battle of the pandemic. I would give it a B-minus at best. We have seen how vulnerable our health care systems are: insufficient and imprecise alert responses, inadequately distributed medical supplies, overloaded and fatigued medical staff, not enough hospital beds, and no timely treatments or cures.

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I see a clear roadmap of how AI, accelerated by the pandemic, will be infused into health care. The potential goes beyond diagnosis and treatment. Getting appointments, paying insurance bills, and other processes should be much less painful. AI combined with robotic process automation can analyze workflows and optimize processes to deliver significantly more efficient medical systems, improve hospital procedures, and streamline insurance fulfillment.

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That future is not as far off as it seems. Soon, as medical science and computer science further converge, we will move into an era of fully autonomous AI when we may expect people to choose wearables, biosensors, and smart home detectors to keep them safe and informed. And as data quality and diversity increase from the wearables and other internet-of-things devices, a virtuous cycle of improvements will kick in.

In this world a novel coronavirus could be tracked, traced, intercepted, and cut off before it got going.

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