Viewpoint: Dr. AI? Artificial intelligence on a path to diagnose conditions and prescribe treatments directly to a patient without a physician

Researchers at Harvard presented a study demonstrating an achievement that would challenge any medical student. ChatGPT, a large language model, passed the U.S. Medical Licensing Exam, outperforming about 10 percent of medical students who fail the test annually.

The inevitable question isn't so much if but when these artificial intelligence devices can step into the shoes of doctors. For some tasks, this medical future is sooner than we think.

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In fields such as medicine, it's less likely that technological inputs will provide major offsets to labor costs, as each patient encounter still requires the intervention of a provider. In sectors such as medicine, the labor itself is the product.

To compensate for these challenges, medicine has incorporated more non-physician providers to lower costs. However, this strategy reduces but doesn't eliminate the central economic dilemma. When the technology becomes the doctor, however, it can be a cure for Baumol's cost disease.

As the quality and scope of clinical data available for training these large language models continue to grow, so will their capabilities. Even if the current stage of development isn't quite ready to completely remove doctors from the decision-making loop, these tools will increasingly enhance the productivity of providers and, in many cases, begin to substitute for them.

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