IJCRT.ORG ISSN : 2320-2882

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

AI Vs. Human Intuition: Who Diagnoses Better? A Comparative Study Of Diagnostic Accuracy And Efficiency In Clinical Decision-Making

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Abstract

The intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) and human intuition in clinical diagnostics has sparked a paradigm shift in medical decision-making. With advances in machine learning, deep learning, and natural language processing, AI systems have demonstrated impressive capabilities in pattern recognition, differential diagnosis, and disease prediction. However, the irreplaceable cognitive heuristics, experiential learning, and emotional intelligence of human clinicians remain vital in ambiguous and complex scenarios. This research paper presents a comprehensive comparative analysis of AI-based diagnostic tools versus human medical professionals across a range of diseases, including radiology, pathology, cardiology, and oncology. Using real-world datasets, clinical case simulations, and literature synthesis, this study evaluates accuracy, sensitivity, specificity, diagnostic time, error rates, and contextual understanding. The results indicate that while AI outperforms in speed and large-scale data analysis, human intuition excels in handling rare presentations, ethical judgments, and patient-specific nuances. A hybrid model leveraging both AI precision and human intuition emerges as the optimal solution for future healthcare systems. This study concludes that AI is not a replacement but a robust augmentation to human expertise, reshaping the future of medical diagnosis through collaborative intelligence.

Keywords

Artificial Intelligence, Human Intuition, Medical Diagnosis, Clinical Decision-Making, Machine Learning, Diagnostic Accuracy, Hybrid Intelligence, Health Informatics, Deep Learning, Diagnostic Tools

1. Introduction

Healthcare has always been at the forefront of technological innovation, and artificial intelligence (AI) represents the most transformative force in diagnostic medicine today. AI systems, particularly those employing machine learning (ML) and deep learning (DL) architectures, have shown promising results in domains like medical imaging, dermatology, oncology, and pathology. Concurrently, human intuition, defined as the tacit knowledge and experiential judgment of clinicians, continues to play a decisive role in diagnostic processes. As AI capabilities grow, a key question arises: who diagnoses better—AI or human intuition?

This paper explores this question by analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches. It investigates diagnostic accuracy, processing time, interpretability, contextual judgment, and patient interaction. By synthesizing research findings, clinical trials, and comparative datasets, the study attempts to evaluate the potential for a symbiotic model combining AI and human intelligence in the diagnostic workflow.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Evolution of AI in Diagnostics

AI in healthcare began with expert systems in the 1970s, such as MYCIN and INTERNIST-1. Modern systems like IBM Watson Health and Google DeepMind have revolutionized data-driven diagnosis. Studies have shown that AI can detect diabetic retinopathy, skin cancer, and pneumonia on par with or better than medical experts (Gulshan et al., 2016; Esteva et al., 2017).

2.2 The Role of Human Intuition

Medical intuition encompasses a clinician's ability to interpret symptoms beyond textbook definitions. Intuition integrates clinical acumen, ethical reasoning, psychological insight, and contextual awareness. According to Croskerry (2009), clinical intuition can outperform algorithms in ambiguous scenarios where emotional, cultural, or psychosocial factors influence diagnosis.

2.3 Comparative Studies

Recent research has shown that AI performs particularly well in imaging diagnostics, where pattern recognition is critical. For instance, a 2020 study comparing radiologists with AI in mammogram readings found that AI achieved higher sensitivity but lower specificity (McKinney et al., 2020). In contrast, human clinicians were better at integrating patient histories and comorbidities, suggesting a complementary role.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining:

- Quantitative analysis of diagnostic performance using publicly available datasets (e.g., MIMIC-III, NIH Chest X-ray Dataset).
- Qualitative interviews with 20 medical practitioners across specialities.
- Simulated diagnostic trials comparing AI tools (Google DeepMind, Aidoc, Zebra Medical Vision) against physicians on 100 anonymised patient cases.

3.2 Evaluation Criteria

The following parameters were used for comparison:

- **Accuracy**: Correctness of diagnosis.
- **Sensitivity and Specificity**: Measures of diagnostic quality.
- **Diagnostic Time**: Time taken to arrive at a decision.
- **Error Rate**: False positives and negatives.

- **Contextual Interpretation**: Ability to handle unstructured data, emotional cues, and cultural sensitivities.

4. Results of the Research

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

Parameter	AI Systems (Avg.)	Human Clinicians (Avg.)
Diagnostic Accuracy	91.6%	88.2%
Sensitivity	94.1%	85.7%
Specificity	88.3%	90.6%
Diagnostic Time	0.5–1.5 min	5–20 min
Error Rate	8.4%	11.8%

AI demonstrated superior speed and slightly higher overall accuracy, especially in radiology and dermatology. However, clinicians outperformed AI in cases requiring judgment under uncertainty, rare disease presentations, or comorbidities.

4.2 Qualitative Insights

Clinicians emphasised that while AI is useful for second opinions and flagging anomalies, it often lacks the nuance needed to consider non-digital inputs like patient demeanour, emotional distress, or social determinants of health. A cardiologist noted, "AI can detect arrhythmias, but it cannot interpret why a patient skipped their meds due to financial stress."

5. Discussion

5.1 Strengths of AI in Diagnostics

- **Scalability**: AI systems can analyse thousands of images in seconds.
- **Objectivity**: Eliminates human biases such as fatigue or cognitive errors.
- **Data Integration**: AI can cross-reference genomics, imaging, and EHR data.

5.2 Limitations of AI

- **Interpretability**: Black-box models lack transparency.
- **Contextual Blindness**: Cannot grasp emotional or psychological nuances.
- **Ethical and Legal Concerns**: Responsibility in cases of misdiagnosis remains unclear.

5.3 Human Intuition: Strengths and Weaknesses

- **Strengths**: Better at navigating uncertain or novel situations, building patient trust, and integrating non-verbal cues.
- **Weaknesses**: Subject to cognitive biases, variable experience, and emotional fatigue.

5.4 Toward a Hybrid Model

A symbiotic model where AI assists in rapid analysis while clinicians provide interpretive and contextual depth is ideal. Clinical decision support systems (CDSS) that offer AI-powered recommendations rather than directives are gaining popularity.

6. Case Study Highlights

Case 1: Radiology

AI diagnosed pneumonia with 94.2% accuracy vs. 89.7% for radiologists but missed atypical TB patterns present in only 1% of cases, which human experts correctly identified.

Case 2: Oncology

AI flagged a breast lesion as benign, but a senior oncologist, noting family history and patient behaviour, insisted on a biopsy, revealing early-stage cancer. This case emphasised the necessity of human oversight.

7. Ethical Considerations

Introducing AI into diagnostics raises pressing ethical questions:

- **Accountability**: Who is liable for AI-driven errors?
- **Informed Consent**: Are patients aware of AI involvement in their diagnosis?
- **Bias in Training Data**: If datasets are skewed demographically, diagnoses may reflect that bias.

Thus, ethical governance and human oversight are essential in AI deployment.

8. Future Scope

- **Explainable AI (XAI)** will improve trust and transparency in decision-making.
- **Federated Learning** could allow AI systems to learn from decentralized datasets while maintaining privacy.
- **AI-Human Collaboration Models** like digital twins and AI-assisted rounds will redefine diagnostics.

9. Conclusion

The contest between AI and human intuition in diagnostics is not one of superiority but of complementarity. AI excels in speed, pattern recognition, and large-scale data analysis. Human intuition thrives in empathy, ethical reasoning, and handling the grey areas of medicine. This study concludes that neither is inherently superior. Instead, the synergy between AI and human judgment offers the most promising path forward. Building systems that leverage AI's analytical prowess with human insight will ensure more accurate, equitable, and patient-centred care.

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