

FRAMEWORK | An Enduring Scope of Practice

The Physician's Role in the Digital and AI Era of Medicine

August 2026



Digital health technologies and artificial intelligence are reshaping how healthcare is delivered. They are changing how clinical knowledge is generated, how decisions are supported, and how patients engage with the healthcare system. These technologies will continue to evolve, becoming more capable, more embedded in clinical workflows, and more influential in the delivery of care. The practice of medicine must evolve alongside them.

Throughout history, physicians have adapted to new diagnostic tools, therapeutics, and models of care while preserving the core responsibilities that define the profession. The digital and AI era is no different. Individual tasks will evolve as technology advances, but the physician's enduring responsibilities remain remarkably stable. The objective is not to preserve every task physicians perform today. It is to strengthen the unique contributions that patients will continue to rely on physicians to provide.

This framework articulates those enduring responsibilities. It provides a foundation for the evolution of clinical practice and establishes a common reference point for education, workforce development, technology design, implementation, payment, and policy. Together with the accompanying [Shared Roadmap for Defining the Physician's Role in the Digital and AI Era](#), it describes both the destination and the pathway for continuing a physician-led future of care.

One defining principle will govern this destination and pathway:

The physician's role will continue to evolve. The profession's enduring responsibilities, including its [ethical principles](#), will not.

As digital health and artificial intelligence reshape medicine, the physician's contribution will increasingly be defined by five enduring responsibilities:

1. Preserve Trust Through Human Connection
2. Demonstrate and Promote Clinical Judgment
3. Lead the Evolution of Medical Practice
4. Steward the Responsible Use of Technology
5. Advance the Profession

These responsibilities provide a stable foundation for the future of medicine, informing clinical practice, education, technology development, implementation, payment, and policy regardless of how technology continues to evolve.

The Enduring Responsibilities of the Physician

1. Preserve Trust Through Human Connection

Ensure empathy, communication, and shared decision-making remain at the heart of medicine.

Trust remains the foundation of medical practice.

As patients increasingly engage with digital health technologies and AI before, during, and between clinical encounters, physicians provide the trusted relationship that helps patients interpret information, navigate uncertainty, and make informed decisions. Compassion, communication, empathy, and shared decision-making remain fundamental responsibilities of the profession.

Technology should strengthen, not diminish, the relationship between physicians and the patients they care for.

2. Demonstrate and Promote Clinical Judgment

Apply clinical expertise, judgment, and accountability where they create the greatest value for patients.

Artificial intelligence can generate information, identify patterns, and support clinical decision-making. Physicians remain responsible for integrating clinical evidence, navigating uncertainty, balancing competing risks, and making decisions that reflect each patient's unique circumstances, preferences, and goals.

As technology assumes a greater role in information processing, the physician's responsibility for clinical judgment becomes increasingly important, and must be supported through appropriate training and education. Patients will continue to rely on physicians to provide the synthesis, discernment, and accountability that technology alone cannot.

3. Lead the Evolution of Medical Practice

Help shape technology-enabled models of care that improve quality, continuity, and access while preserving the physician's highest-value contributions.

Digital health and AI create opportunities to redistribute clinical work across physicians, other clinical professionals, patients, and technology. Physicians help determine where their expertise creates the greatest value, ensuring that technology

and new models of care improve quality, continuity, and access without compromising accountability or trust.

Physicians play a central role in shaping technology-enabled models of medical practice, helping define which responsibilities should remain physician-led, which can be safely supported by other members of the care team, patients, or technology, and where new models can improve patient care. The future of medicine will be defined not by technology adoption alone, but by the thoughtful evolution of medical practice.

4. Steward the Responsible Use of Technology

Guide the safe, effective, equitable, and evidence-based integration of digital health and AI into clinical practice.

Physicians play a central role in ensuring that digital health technologies and AI are implemented safely, effectively, equitably, and in ways supported by appropriate evidence.

This responsibility extends beyond technology adoption. Physicians help define where technology creates value, where human oversight remains essential, and how new capabilities should be integrated into clinical workflows. They contribute to the continuous evaluation of technology-enabled care, identify unintended consequences, intervene when technology fails to serve the needs of individual patients, and help ensure innovation advances patient care rather than simply introducing new complexity.

The future of medicine must be guided by what patients need, not by what technology can do.

5. Advance the Profession

Prepare future generations of physicians while preserving and strengthening clinical expertise and ethical decision-making.

The physician's responsibility extends beyond individual patient encounters to the stewardship of medicine itself.

Physicians lead the evolution of clinical practice while clinical professionals collectively establish the competencies, education, and professional standards required to practice effectively in the digital and AI era. They prepare future generations of physicians, preserving the independent clinical expertise required to exercise judgment, provide oversight, and remain accountable as technology becomes increasingly capable.

As healthcare evolves, physicians remain stewards of clinical expertise, ensuring that technology strengthens rather than diminishes the profession's ability to serve every patient who relies on them.

Enabling the Future of Medicine

Physicians cannot realize this future alone. Supporting these enduring responsibilities requires coordinated action across the healthcare ecosystem. Patients and patient groups must continue to define the outcomes, experiences, and values that technology-enabled care should deliver. Physicians must listen and lead, in lockstep with their fellow clinical professionals, while ensuring that education and professional development preserve the independent clinical expertise on which clinical judgment, oversight, and accountability depend. Technology developers and investors must build trustworthy solutions informed by clinical practice and patient priorities. Policymakers and payers must create the policy, payment, and infrastructure needed to enable technology-enabled models of care.

Each stakeholder contributes a distinct but complementary role. Patients define value. Physicians lead the evolution of clinical practice alongside the broader clinical community. Policymakers create the conditions. Technology developers build the capabilities. Progress depends on these pathways advancing together through sustained collaboration and continuous learning.

The accompanying [Shared Roadmap for Defining the Physician's Role in the Digital and AI Era](#) translates this framework into a shared roadmap across the healthcare ecosystem. It identifies the priorities, partnerships, and areas for continued collaboration needed to translate these enduring responsibilities into education, clinical practice, technology development, payment, and policy. As digital health and AI continue to evolve, so too will this work. The American Medical Association is committed to working alongside the full healthcare ecosystem, including physicians, other clinical professionals, patients, technology developers, policymakers, payers, and others, to ensure the future of medicine strengthens the profession, empowers care teams, and improves care for every patient.