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Robotic Caretakers

Over the last couple of decades, we have seen a large increase in the amount of AI being used to replace human workers. Many of these positions have been ones that were deemed unsafe for humans, but more recently there has been an influx of AI seen in other fields as well. The medical field is no exception to this change in pace the modern world is experiencing, and the emergence of robotic nurses and care takers have been seen all over the world.

A large portion of the population is made up of elderly people (more than a quarter), and there is a very high demand for nurses in response to this. This demand is not able to be met, and this issue will only worsen as time goes on. The use of AI in nursing homes is essential now more than ever.

The current technologies we have for taking care of elderly patients using AI has a lot of benefits. These robots are currently used to do most common chores like laundry and cleaning, but also greet patients and can be programmed to administer medical services although currently they are not authorized to do so. Using robots is also advantageous because they are much easier to train, they are cheaper to maintain (they don’t get paid a salary), they’re easier to repair, and they are able to complete repetitive tasks without tiring or having to meet work code regulations. Robots are also not human, so they can be used in high risk experiment trials that we would normally not want to include humans in. By implementing AI in hospitals, we may also be able to offer services at a lower cost to the patient. The cost of human labor would be eliminated since the work would be done by a robot (Grasso, 2018).

Another benefit of having AI in the hospitals, specifically nursing homes, is for comfort. Patients who do not have frequent visitors can always count on the AI staff to keep them engaged. These robots will be able to remind patients when they need to take medications on a consistent basis as well. Again, since they are not human, they will not need any days off or have any restriction in hours they are able to perform their jobs. This provides a very efficient means of performing routine tasks while also keeping the patient comfortable and independent at an optimal price. Another benefit of having full time AI with the patient is that they are able to monitor them and collect data, this can be especially useful for patients with things like diabetes or heart failure so that a human can be notified immediately if there is an irregular or alarming patterns in their data collection. This data can also later reveal patterns and assist in diagnosis as well (Grasso, 2018).

While AI does seem promising for the future, there are a number of issues associated with it worth mentioning. One of the most prevalent of these issues being privacy. AI has made, and will continue to make, data collection, processing, and sharing virtually limitless. Health care providers are able to collect extensive data on patients, process it very quickly, and share it with other providers and family members. This does seem very beneficial, but it also raises an ethical dilemmas of when it is authorized to share this information, to whom it may be shared with, and who is authorized to make these decisions in the place of the patient if they are unable to do so themselves (Grasso, 2018).   
 Another topic that troubles people is the lack of human interaction with patients. If we replace all the human staff with AI, patients may be restricted to very little actual human interaction. Some view this as a potentially harmful consequence, while others still believe it will provide 24-hour companionship for patients who would otherwise have very few visitors.

One of the more serious issues with having AI heavily implemented in hospitals as robotic care takers is the topic of liability. In terms of legality, if something were to go wrong and a patient were harmed while under the care of a robotic entity, it would be difficult to assign liability to a single person. You cannot take a robot to court, so you would then have to decide who is responsible for the actions of the robot. Is it the manufacture? Is it the operator? Is it the programmer of the device? All of these people would hold some amount of responsibility for the situation, which would make for a very interesting court case. Another factor to take into consideration would be the emotional distress making that decision would cause the patient, and if they are even able to make the decision for who is to be held responsible in an accurate way (are they a child? Do they have dementia?).

Attributions

Grasso, C. (2018, June 26). *Challenges and advantages of robotic nursing care: a social and ethical*

*analysis* [The Corporate Social Responsibility and Business Ethics Blog]. The Corporate

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