

Two AI Trends That Will Change Urgent Care

Urgent Message: While there are seemingly countless applications for artificial intelligence in healthcare, ambient scribes and front desk automation are key solutions that are readily available for adoption by urgent care providers.

Alan A. Ayers, MBA, MAcc

Citation: Ayers AA. Two AI Trends That Will Change Urgent Care. *J Urgent Care Med.* 2025; 19(8):43-45

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming healthcare, and urgent care operators have increasing opportunities to leverage AI in a way that works for patients and providers. While many AI-driven innovations are still in development, 2 solutions are emerging in 2025: ambient AI scribes; and AI front-office automation.

Promising technologies have accelerated throughput and raised efficiency in urgent care for decades. Electronic medical record (EMR) systems enhance clinical decision-making by identifying potential diagnoses and making documentation faster, for example. Algorithms can review documentation of a patient visit to determine medical decision-making levels and suggest billing codes. Dynamic queuing systems give patients accurate, up-to-the-minute, wait-time estimates, allowing them to wait from the comfort of home before arriving at the urgent care. As another example, image recognition software is also improving the accuracy of digital x-ray over-reads in urgent care.

Building on these prevailing technologies, AI scribes and front desk automation are additional advancements beginning to deliver value. AI scribes help reduce time-consuming documentation, allowing clinicians to focus on patient interactions and achieve higher productivity. Front desk AI streamlines a center's workflows from scheduling and check-ins to follow-ups and administrative communication.

In this article, we'll explore how these 2 AI solutions



function and how they will influence urgent care's daily operations.

Ambient AI Scribes: Transforming Documentation

Documentation is one of the most time-consuming aspects of a clinician's day, taking time away from face-to-face patient interactions. Time spent in documentation is also a top complaint among clinicians, frequently causing burnout, even though it's necessary for optimizing patient health, business revenue cycle management, and compliance with legal standards.¹ Ambient AI scribes aim to change this dynamic by automating

Author affiliations: Alan A. Ayers, MBA, MAcc, is President of Urgent Care Consultants and is Senior Editor of *The Journal of Urgent Care Medicine*.

clinical documentation in real time, thus increasing the provider's capacity for patient interactions.

These transcribing tools “listen” to audible patient-provider conversations and extract relevant clinical details. They then generate structured notes or populate the EMR through direct integration. Using an AI scribe can automate some of the provider's notation work, requiring only a review of the captured information to ensure accuracy rather than the provider keying in the notes manually.

Unlike traditional dictation software—which requires manual editing and is often used after the patient interaction—ambient AI scribes process natural conversation and write notes in real time at the bedside.

Impact on Urgent Care

Studies show that ambulatory-care providers spend 37% of their time in the exam room on EMR work.² Off-loading some of this burden to an AI scribe can potentially free the provider to see more patients per shift without feeling overwhelmed by paperwork.

AI scribes also have the potential to improve the patient experience. Automating documentation allows the provider to maintain eye contact and engage more meaningfully with patients.

Beyond improving efficiency, AI scribes can also help reduce documentation errors and omissions by capturing details of conversations. By recording clinically relevant information, such tools can improve coding accuracy and reduce claim denials from insurance providers. Additionally, AI scribes help maintain compliance with documentation standards and facilitate accurate record keeping for audits and billing.

Challenges and Considerations

Despite the potential benefits, AI scribes are not without challenges. Operators should consider the following factors when implementing these tools:

- **Patient acceptance:** While studies show anecdotally positive patient sentiment toward AI scribes, clear communication and education are necessary.³ Centers using this technology should inform patients upfront and obtain consent to ensure transparency and trust.
- **Regulatory compliance:** Compliance with HIPAA and data security standards is mandatory for AI scribes and human providers alike. Operators must ensure their chosen AI solution meets these privacy requirements.⁴
- **Provider oversight:** While AI scribes can help to reduce a provider's workload, no automation is

perfect. Providers must still review and verify the generated notes to correct any inaccuracies before finalizing their documentation in the EMR.

AI Front Desk Automation: Streamlining Patient Interactions

The front desk is a bottleneck for many urgent care centers. Staff members must juggle phone calls, check-ins, insurance verification, payment collection, scheduling, and more. Often, the same staff have other duties, such as turning over rooms or restocking supplies. AI-driven front desk automation aims to alleviate some of this burden by handling routine administrative tasks, allowing staff to prioritize patients.

AI tools can answer phone calls, respond to text messages, schedule appointments, send reminders, verify insurance details, and even collect payment. Some urgent care centers are already experimenting with AI-driven virtual concierges that interact with patients via text or voice, mimicking a live receptionist.

While the goal is not to eliminate human staff, AI can significantly reduce the volume of repetitive tasks, ensuring front desk personnel are available to handle more complex or sensitive patient interactions.

Impact on Urgent Care

AI front desk automation has the potential to transform both operational efficiency and patient experience. For instance, a patient checking in at the center might not need to wait while the receptionist fields a phone call from another patient asking about clinic hours or insurance coverage. Instead, the AI handles the phone call inquiries autonomously, while in-person staff turns their attention to the patient checking in instead.

AI automation also enhances convenience for patients beyond the center's walls. Many patients seek information outside of traditional business hours, and AI can handle these inquiries 24/7.

Current technology already allows these systems to answer general questions with impressive accuracy, and the capability of AI front desk tools will only improve with time. Automated systems can also send text reminders, process digital check-ins, and provide estimated wait times, helping patients better plan their visits.

Challenges and Considerations

While AI front desk automation offers clear benefits, operators should consider these challenges before implementing this technology:

- **Balancing AI with human interaction:** AI should

enhance, not replace, personalized, face-to-face service. Urgent care centers must ensure that patients who prefer human interaction can still easily access it.

- **Patient frustrations with AI:** Many patients dislike automated phone systems, even if they are fast and accurate, and will become frustrated when they can't reach a live person. Operators must be mindful of how this may negatively affect patient perception of their urgent care brand.⁵
- **Implementation costs and training:** While AI can help reduce long-term administrative costs, upfront investments in software and training can change the value proposition.

The Future of AI in Urgent Care

AI is actively shaping how urgent care operators will approach administrative workflows and the patient experience now and in the near future. Both ambient AI scribes and AI-driven front desk automation are advancing to improve efficiency, enable long-term cost savings, and enhance the patient experience.

However, as the technology behind these tools is still developing, urgent care owners and operators must carefully consider how to best integrate them into their centers' unique workflows while maintaining high standards of care and improving patient satisfaction. Having the right adoption strategy is paramount. Operators

must ensure that providers and support staff are properly trained, address patient concerns about the use of AI in their care, and maintain compliance with all privacy and security regulations.

Although AI has the power to dramatically enhance organizational efficiency, it can't supplant human oversight and manual review. No AI tool is 100% accurate, and operators must continue to prioritize the personal touch patients expect.

AI adoption in urgent care is likely to accelerate in the months ahead as even more tools and technologies emerge. However, urgent care's core mission remains the same: delivering timely, high-quality, patient-centered care. Leveraging AI tools strategically will allow urgent care operators to optimize their operations while keeping the focus on this essential mission. ■

References

1. Budd J. Burnout Related to Electronic Health Record Use in Primary Care. *J Prim Care Community Health*. 2023;14:21501319231166921. doi:10.1177/21501319231166921
2. Christine Sinsky, Lacey Colligan, Ling Li, et al. Allocation of Physician Time in Ambulatory Practice: A Time and Motion Study in 4 Specialties. *Ann Intern Med*. 2016;165:753-760. [Epub 6 September 2016]. doi:10.7326/M16-0961
3. Tierney AA, Gayre G, Hoberman B, Mattern B, Ballesca M, Kipnis P, et al. Ambient artificial intelligence scribes to alleviate the burden of clinical documentation. *NEJM Catalyst*. Feb 21, 2024;5(3):692-694.
4. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. 45 CFR §164.312(e)(2)(ii) (2024). Accessed March 4, 2025. [https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-45/subtitle-A/subchapter-C/part-164/subpart-C/section-164.312#p-164.312\(e\)\(2\)\(ii\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-45/subtitle-A/subchapter-C/part-164/subpart-C/section-164.312#p-164.312(e)(2)(ii))
5. Griffith K, Davies ML, Pizer S, Prentice J. Call center performance affects patient perceptions of access and satisfaction. *Am J Manag Care*. 2019;25(6):282-287.

ADAPT. OPTIMIZE. THRIVE.

\\SHAPING THE FUTURE

2025 NERUCA CONFERENCE

SEPTEMBER 28-30 \\ FOXWOODS RESORT & CASINO



Scan for tickets and
sponsor opportunities

- Network with the top urgent care operators in the Northeast and make lasting connections in the industry.
- Earn up to 6 CME Credits.
- Hands-on provider Skills Track back by popular demand!

NERUCA
NORTH EAST REGIONAL URGENT CARE ASSOCIATION