

AI's role in combatting inequalities in healthcare

 By [Nicci Botha](#)

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Globally, the challenge of any healthcare system is to deliver consistent services across the board, whether it's in a big city or a rural setting.



Frank Hester, CEO, TPP Healthcare

This is not just a developing world problem. Frank Hester, CEO of TPP Healthcare, said that in UK a study showed that one life was lost as a result of care levels for every tube stop you moved away from the Houses of Parliament in London.

Hester said he was software architect in the financial sector, before moving into healthcare and founding TPP. His inspiration was to build systems that removed the administrative burden from his wife, a family doctor, so she could focus on delivering care for her patients. The focus was sharing patient records across the network.

“To build real artificial intelligence (AI) you need big data and you need a lot of it. But we haven’t quite seen the digital revolution in the healthcare. It’s tricky to design software for doctors,” he said.

Primary healthcare

“So we looked at how do we keep people out of hospitals? Often by the time they are admitted to hospital, it is too late. Our focus is therefore on primary healthcare.”

Hester explained that the starting point was working out what doctors and nurses do in a consultation, particularly looking at ovarian cancer.

“Ovarian cancer is a silent killer, but tricky to spot in a 30 minute consultation. In 50% of the consultations where we used AI alongside a healthcare professional, AI detected ovarian cancer before the doctor or nurse. But we were nervous about the reactions from doctors.”

He used the analogy of a spell checker program to explain the complementary role of AI in healthcare. “I use a spell checker to check the accuracy of my work, but it does not replace me. AI is something that sits beside the doctor to ease the load.

“I have never gone to a country where they say they have enough doctors or nurses. AI means that rural areas have the same access to healthcare as cities. The game in town is to get as much data as possible into AI, which can help doctors to manage more patients,” Hester said.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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