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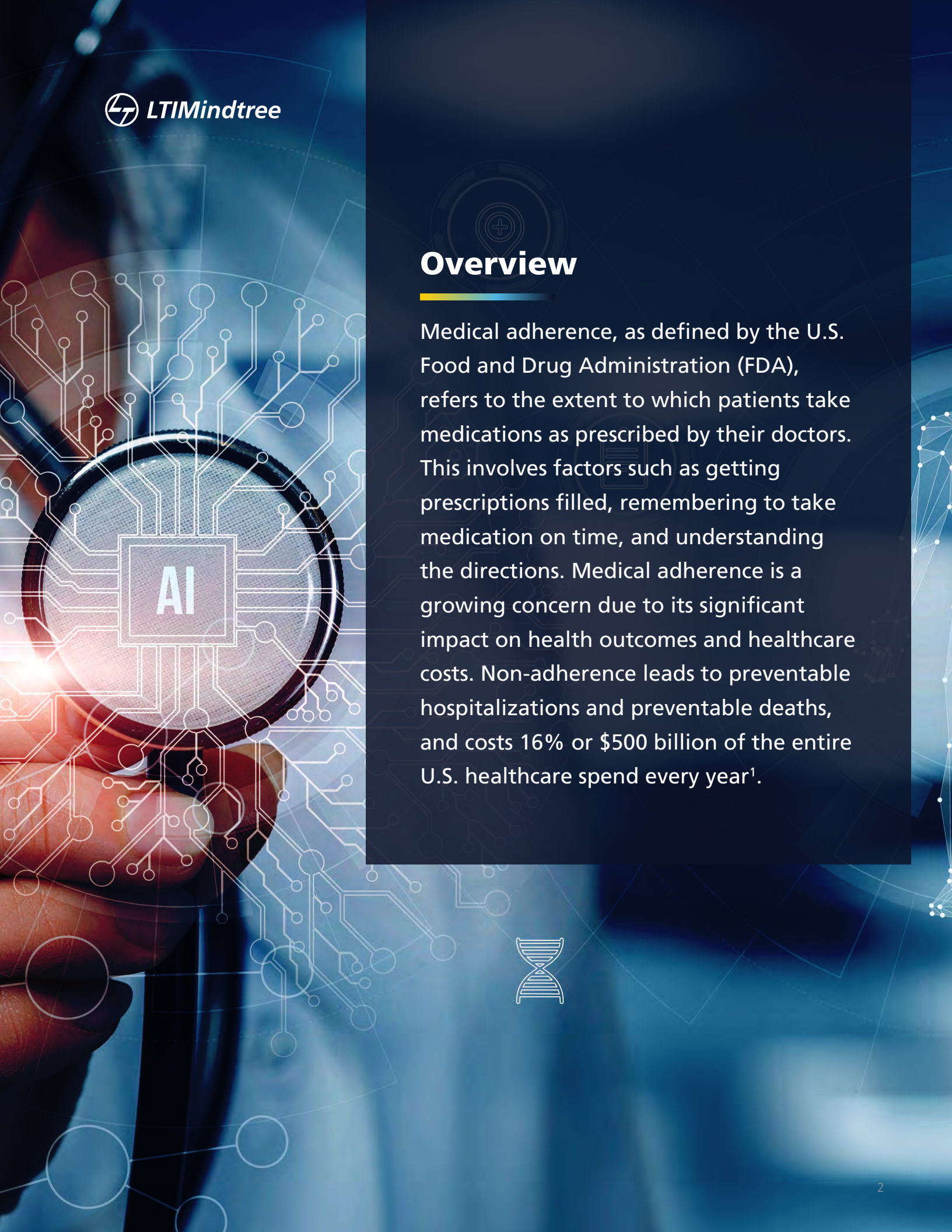
AI-Powered Action Plan

6 Steps to Combat Medical Non-Adherence



Overview

Medical adherence, as defined by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), refers to the extent to which patients take medications as prescribed by their doctors. This involves factors such as getting prescriptions filled, remembering to take medication on time, and understanding the directions. Medical adherence is a growing concern due to its significant impact on health outcomes and healthcare costs. Non-adherence leads to preventable hospitalizations and preventable deaths, and costs 16% or $500 billion of the entire U.S. healthcare spend every year[1].

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Principal factors driving medication non-adherence

Medication non-adherence can be influenced by a variety of factors, each presenting unique challenges for patients. These factors include:

Forgetfulness and reluctance

Many patients may unintentionally neglect their medication schedules due to forgetfulness or a lack of focus. Additionally, some patients may demonstrate disinterest, meaning they are resistant to initiating or maintaining a treatment regimen despite knowing its importance. This can stem from a lack of motivation, cognitive distractions, or simply being overwhelmed by other daily responsibilities.

Comorbidities and multiple prescriptions (polypharmacy)

Patients with multiple health conditions, or comorbidities, often have to manage several medications simultaneously. This can create a complex regimen that is difficult to follow, increasing the risk of non-adherence. The challenge of coordinating numerous prescriptions, managing potential drug interactions, and dealing with varying dosages can overwhelm patients, making them more likely to miss doses or stop treatment altogether.

Negative experiences and fear associated with the drug

Patients who have previously experienced adverse effects from medication or have a general fear of side effects may be hesitant to continue their prescribed treatment. This fear can be magnified by misinformation or a lack of clear communication from healthcare providers about the safety and necessity of the drug, leading to distrust or avoidance.

Concerns over high medication costs

The financial burden of medication can be a significant barrier to adherence. Patients may be forced to make difficult choices between paying for their medication and covering other essential living expenses. This economic pressure can lead to rationing of doses, skipping treatments, or abandoning the medication entirely, particularly if the patient feels uncertain about its immediate benefits.

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Dimensions of non-adherence drivers

The drivers of non-adherence can be categorized into four dimensions:

Social and economic

This includes demographics (education and income levels), household stability (marital status, presence and number of children, and employment and education levels), low health literacy, lack of health insurance, and medication cost.

Patient-related

Factors such as perceived risk or susceptibility to disease, perceived benefit of treatment, concerns about dependency, cognitive challenges, hectic lifestyle, and depression.

Health system

Issues like restricted formularies, payor type, co-pay amount, patient-provider relationship, lack of a synchronized care regimen, long wait times, and stock-outs.

Condition and therapy

Past experiences with a condition or drug, need for cost-effective generic or therapeutic alternatives, actual side effects experienced, need for better pharmacy advisory and patient education, presence and number of comorbidities, number and type of concurrent medications/prescriptions, complexity of medication regimen, and non-adherence to other drugs.

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Transformative role of AI

Artificial Intelligence can play a transformative role in improving medication adherence by leveraging several opportunities across various aspects of healthcare management.

01

Chronic disease co-management

AI-driven platforms can help patients manage chronic conditions more effectively by analyzing real-time health data, medication usage, and treatment responses. By monitoring vitals, symptoms, and medication adherence, AI can provide predictive alerts, suggest timely interventions, and even communicate with healthcare providers to adjust treatment plans. Leveraging such predictive analytics in healthcare creates a more coordinated and proactive approach to managing chronic diseases, reducing the likelihood of missed doses. Chronic disease management requires continuous monitoring and time-series analysis of patient data such as symptoms, medication intake, and vital signs. RNNs [Recurrent Neural Network], particularly LSTMs[Long Short-Term Memory], are well-suited for handling sequential data and predicting future trends in patient health by learning from historical patterns.

02

Medication synchronization

AI can optimize medication synchronization by aligning refill schedules for patients on multiple medications. By analyzing prescription data and patient behavior, AI algorithms can send personalized reminders to patients and pharmacies, ensuring that medications are refilled and ready for pick-up at the same time. The benefit of AI in healthcare is that it reduces the cognitive load on patients and minimizes the chances of missed doses due to confusion or delays in obtaining prescriptions. Medication synchronization requires a system to optimize schedules based on multiple factors like patient behavior, prescription times, and refill patterns. Decision trees or rule-based systems and predictive analytics in healthcare can handle structured decision-making processes effectively by identifying the best times to synchronize medications and generating alerts.

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03

Personalized interactions

AI systems can analyze individual patient behaviors, preferences, and health records to provide highly personalized engagement. AI chatbots, voice assistants, or mobile apps can offer tailored medication reminders, educational content, and emotional support to address the specific barriers each patient faces. For example, if a patient struggles with side effects, the AI system can offer tips to manage them, while for others, it might focus on reinforcing the importance of consistency in taking medication. Personalized interactions rely heavily on understanding patient language and responding appropriately. NLP models, especially transformer-based models like GPT, are good at interpreting patient responses, answering questions, and delivering customized messages. These models can be fine-tuned for healthcare communication to provide empathetic, targeted reminders and information.

04

Pharmacy-physician engagement

AI can enhance communication between pharmacists and physicians by analyzing patient data to identify potential non-adherence or medication interactions early. AI systems can automatically flag issues like missed refills, dangerous drug combinations, or adherence challenges and facilitate faster, data-driven interventions. This enhanced collaboration ensures that both the pharmacy and physician are aligned in supporting patient adherence and can intervene quickly if issues arise.

AI systems facilitating pharmacy-physician communication need to predict risks of non-adherence and drug interactions from complex data. Gradient boosting algorithms (GBMs) can handle this well, as they can model complex relationships and interactions within large, multidimensional datasets while providing accurate predictions of adherence risks. GBMs ae effective for decision-making tasks that involve multiple inputs from both pharmacists and physicians. They can analyze data on prescriptions, patient adherence, and potential drug interactions to generate clear, interpretable decisions and flag any issues requiring immediate action, helping streamline collaboration between pharmacies and physicians.

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05

Adherence profiling for refills and pick-ups

AI can analyze patients' historical data to create adherence profiles, predicting their likelihood of picking up medications on time or missing refills. Pharmacies can use this information to send automated reminders or even pre-emptively fill prescriptions to ensure patients do not run out of medication. Additionally, AI can provide pharmacies and healthcare providers with insights into which patients might need more support, allowing for targeted adherence interventions. Clustering algorithms such as K-Means or DBSCAN can group patients based on their adherence patterns and predict future refill behavior. By creating adherence profiles, pharmacies can target specific groups of patients for reminders or interventions, making the profiling process more efficient and data-driven.

06

Driving medical adherence across patient lifecycle

Medical adherence can be driven across the patient lifecycle through various stages such as issue/review of prescription, prescription intake, data entry, prescription adjudication, patient counselling, drug utilization, prescription filling, payments (point of sale), generating adherence profile, creating patient segmentation, adherence-based co-pay adjustments, history and adherence profile-based counselling, smart packaging and app-based consumption tracking, personalized interactions and reminders, counselling interventions (video and tele), adherence profile-based counselling, providing therapeutic alternatives, branded substitution, compound prescriptions, medical regime management, and medication synchronization.

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Conclusion

AI has the transformative capability to reshape how medication adherence is managed by offering personalized, data-driven interventions and real-time support across multiple aspects of patient care. By leveraging advanced algorithms and predictive analytics in healthcare, AI can analyze patient behavior, anticipate adherence challenges, and customize solutions that meet the unique needs of each individual. Whether it is through tailored reminders that fit a patient's lifestyle, seamless communication between healthcare providers and pharmacies, or predictive analytics that ensure timely prescription refills, AI-based systems can address the complex and varied reasons behind non-adherence. This comprehensive approach reaps many benefits of AI in healthcare. It not only helps patients stay on track with their medications but also fosters better health outcomes and an overall improvement in their quality of life.

Moreover, AI's predictive capabilities enable healthcare providers to intervene early, identifying patients at risk of falling behind on their treatments. This allows for proactive engagement, such as sending motivational messages, adjusting treatment plans, or offering educational support to address concerns or side effects. By acting as a continuous support system, AI can alleviate the burden on both patients and healthcare providers, ensuring that the management of chronic conditions or complex medication regimens becomes more effective and less overwhelming.

Ultimately, AI-driven solutions empower healthcare systems to move from reactive to proactive care, ensuring that medication adherence is no longer a major obstacle to patient health, but rather an integral part of personalized healthcare management.

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About the Author

Himanshu Kukreti

Director, Healthcare, LTIMindtree

Himanshu is an accomplished IT leader with two decades of experience in delivering large-scale, transformative digital solutions for Fortune Top 10 companies. He has extensive experience in product engineering, portfolio management, global delivery management and program governance. He has deep interest in how emerging technologies, particularly AI, can revolutionize industries such as healthcare by addressing key challenges and unlocking new opportunities. He has a proven track record of partnering with senior leadership teams to design and implement innovative IT solutions that accelerate digital transformation, enhance customer experiences, and improve bottom-line performance.

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