# PHYSICIANS IN MEDICINE: FROM HEALERS TO INNOVATORS IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

**Mehwash Iftikhar[1], Sheraz Jamal Khan[1]**

From the physician-priests of ancient civilizations to the algorithm-assisted clinicians of the mid-2020s, the identity of the physician has been continuously evolved by knowledge, technology, and social expectations. In 2025, as artificial intelligence (AI), tele-health, precision medicine, and digital diagnostics mature, the role of physicians is again changing. As we trace this historical evolution and transformation, we can contextualize the physician's role in 2025 and envision the future trajectory of medicine.

In antiquity, healing was intertwined with ritual, philosophy, and spiritual authority. Hippocrates and Galen pioneered a paradigmatic shift whereby disease transitioned from divine curse to natural process open to reason and observation (1). The Hippocratic Oath established an enduring moral foundation centered on service to life, professional integrity, and the principle of non-maleficence: tenets that have outlasted centuries (2). Over the Middle Ages and into the Islamic Golden Age, physicians became scholar-clinicians, translating, synthesizing, and teaching medical knowledge in institutions across Baghdad, Cordoba, and Cairo, canonizing medicine as a learned discipline (3). With the Renaissance and Enlightenment, anatomy, physiology, chemistry, and microbiology converged to define medicine as empirical science. Figures like Harvey and Pasteur discredited outdated dogmas and anchored medicine in experimentation and evidence (4,5).

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries brought transformative innovations—the stethoscope, microscope, antibiotics, vaccines, and organized public health system that reshaped disease care and prevention (6).

[1] Hayatabad Medical Complex, Peshawar

**Address for Correspondence**
**Prof. Dr. Sheraz Jamal Khan**
Professor, Department of Medicine, Hayatabad Medical Complex, Peshawar.
shiraz.jamal@me.com

The physician's role expanded into public health, systems leadership, research, and policy. Professional regulation through licensing bodies and codes of ethics crystallized medicine as both a technical and moral vocation (7,8). Through each era, the core mission remained constant: to heal, to understand, and to bear responsibility for human life.

We now stand at a pivotal moment where AI and digital health are not speculative tools but operational realities in medicine. AI's integration into clinical workflows has accelerated substantially, with applications spanning diagnosis, prognosis, and decision support across specialties (9,10). Generative and multimodal AI systems now integrate text, imaging, and structured data to support complex medical reasoning (11). Healthcare systems are deploying advanced autonomous AI solutions that independently perform patient triage, continuous monitoring, and appointment scheduling with precision and efficiency. (12). Yet the physician's human judgment remains the cornerstone of care. The physician of 2025 is an interpreter and integrator, bridging algorithmic output and patient context; a guardian of ethics and trust; a designer of safe, fair systems; and a lifelong learner capable of adapting to innovation. The COVID-19 pandemic reaffirmed that tools are only as meaningful as the conscience that wields them (13).

In 2024, the World Health Organization issued guidance entitled "Ethics and Governance of Artificial Intelligence for Health: Guidance on Large Multi-Modal Models," introducing over forty recommendations to ensure transparency, fairness, safety, and accountability (14). Physicians are central actors in this landscape—not only as users but as co-regulators and moral stewards. This demands AI literacy, interdisciplinary collaboration, and advocacy for equitable governance (15,16). Despite its promise, AI in medicine confronts multiple challenges: bias, lack of transparency, regulatory lag, inequity, and clinician burnout. Many models falter when deployed beyond training environments (17,18). Physicians must innovate responsibly—participating in AI design—and advocate for policies that ensure accessibility, fairness, and inclusivity, especially in low-resource settings (19,20).

Through millennia, medicine's tools have changed—pulses gave way to sphygmomanometers, glass slides to digital pathology, stethoscopes to AI-augmented auscultation. Yet what endures is the physician's commitment: to heal, to interpret, to accompany patients through vulnerability. In 2025, physicians are not displaced by algorithms but challenged to steward their use wisely (21,22). The future of medicine will not be defined by machines but by those who choose to wield them with empathy, humility, and moral clarity. Medicine's tools will evolve again—and with them, the physician. But the timeless question remains: Who do we heal, and how do we stay worthy of that trust?

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