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AI in Pediatric and Geriatric Healthcare: A Comparative Review of Innovations and Gaps

Irfan Pasha

Bangalore University

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Abstract - Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming healthcare by enhancing diagnostic precision, optimizing clinical workflows, and supporting personalized care. However, its application across diverse age groups—particularly pediatric and geriatric populations—presents unique challenges and opportunities. This paper provides a comprehensive review of AI innovations in pediatric and geriatric healthcare, highlighting similarities, contrasts, and critical gaps that need to be addressed. It explores the distinctive clinical, ethical, and technical considerations in these populations, evaluates current AI-driven solutions, and discusses emerging trends in machine learning, deep learning, and natural language processing. The paper also identifies key areas where AI integration is limited, examining barriers to adoption, regulatory hurdles, and disparities in data representation. Concluding with strategic recommendations, this paper aims to inform stakeholders about the development and deployment of equitable, effective, and patient-centered AI tools that cater to the unique needs of both pediatric and geriatric patients.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Pediatric Healthcare, Geriatric Healthcare, Healthcare Innovations, Technology Gaps

Introduction

The advent of AI technologies has revolutionized many aspects of healthcare, from early disease detection and decision support to administrative efficiency and predictive analytics. However, the deployment of AI in clinical practice must consider the distinctive physiological, developmental, and sociocultural characteristics of different patient populations. Pediatric and geriatric populations represent two ends of the age spectrum, each with specific healthcare needs and vulnerabilities. While children require age-appropriate interventions that account for growth, development, and parental consent, older adults often face multimorbidity, frailty, cognitive decline, and polypharmacy. AI offers promising tools to address these challenges, yet its implementation is often uneven and fraught with barriers.

This paper explores the landscape of AI applications in pediatric and geriatric healthcare. It begins by examining the fundamental differences between these populations and the implications for AI design and deployment. It then reviews state-of-the-art innovations, highlighting how AI technologies are currently being used in clinical settings. A comparative analysis reveals both shared and divergent challenges, from data representation and bias to regulatory frameworks and clinical adoption. The paper concludes by proposing strategies to bridge existing gaps and ensure that AI innovations effectively serve the diverse needs of all patients.

Distinctive Considerations in Pediatric and Geriatric Healthcare:

Pediatric patients are characterized by rapid physiological changes, developmental milestones, and age-specific disease patterns. Data collection in this population often involves parental proxies, and ethical concerns around consent and assent are paramount. Clinical manifestations of disease can vary significantly across developmental stages, necessitating tailored AI models that can account for age-specific presentations and dynamic growth trajectories. Moreover, data availability can be limited, as children generally have fewer encounters with the healthcare system compared to adults, posing challenges for robust model training.

In contrast, geriatric patients frequently present with complex comorbidities, polypharmacy, cognitive impairments, and functional limitations. Data heterogeneity and variability in care pathways complicate AI deployment. Moreover, issues of frailty and functional status often intersect with clinical outcomes, requiring AI models to integrate multifaceted data types, including laboratory results, imaging, clinical notes, and even social determinants of health. Ethical concerns include autonomy, informed consent, and the potential for algorithmic biases to exacerbate health disparities in older adults.

AI Innovations in Pediatric Healthcare:

AI applications in pediatric healthcare have shown remarkable promise in areas such as early disease detection, developmental monitoring, and precision medicine. Machine learning models trained on pediatric EHRs have been deployed to identify sepsis, predict asthma exacerbations, and forecast hospital readmissions, enabling timely interventions. Computer vision techniques have enhanced diagnostic accuracy in imaging, including automated detection of pneumonia, congenital heart disease, and retinopathy of prematurity.

Natural language processing has facilitated the extraction of relevant clinical information from pediatric narratives, improving documentation and care coordination. Chatbots and virtual assistants designed for pediatric populations support education, medication adherence, and behavioral health interventions, often incorporating gamification to engage younger patients. However, many AI models developed for adult populations fail to generalize effectively to pediatric cohorts, highlighting the need for age-specific data and models that capture developmental trajectories.

AI Innovations in Geriatric Healthcare:

In geriatrics, AI has been instrumental in addressing the complexities of multimorbidity, medication management, and cognitive health. Predictive models have been developed to identify patients at risk of falls, hospital readmissions, and adverse drug events, enabling preemptive care planning. Machine learning algorithms have analyzed EHR data to stratify frailty levels and guide interventions that reduce hospitalizations and improve quality of life.

Natural language processing has been used to analyze clinician notes and social work documentation to identify signs of cognitive decline, depression, and elder abuse, facilitating early intervention and safeguarding vulnerable patients. AI-driven decision support systems aid clinicians in optimizing polypharmacy regimens, reducing the risk of medication-related harm. In radiology, AI tools assist in detecting age-related diseases such as osteoporosis and neurodegenerative disorders. However, challenges related to data sparsity, underrepresentation of older adults in clinical trials, and algorithmic bias remain significant barriers to widespread adoption.

Comparative Analysis of Innovations and Gaps:

A comparative analysis reveals both shared and unique challenges in AI deployment across pediatric and geriatric healthcare. Both populations suffer from data limitations, albeit for different reasons. In pediatrics, the relatively healthy nature of the population results in fewer data points, while in geriatrics, data complexity arises from multimorbidity and fragmented care. Algorithmic bias is a shared concern, as both groups are often underrepresented in large training datasets, leading to potential disparities in AI performance.

Ethical considerations also converge around issues of consent, autonomy, and privacy. For children, parental consent and assent are required, complicating data governance and model deployment. For older adults, cognitive decline and functional impairments can affect capacity for informed consent, necessitating robust ethical safeguards. Regulatory frameworks must balance innovation with patient protection, ensuring that AI tools are safe, effective, and equitable.

Technical challenges vary between the two populations. Pediatric AI models must adapt to growth and development, requiring dynamic modeling approaches. Geriatric AI systems must integrate heterogeneous data sources and account for the interplay of comorbidities and functional status. The lack of standardized outcome measures further complicates model validation and generalizability in both populations.

Strategies for Bridging Gaps and Enhancing Equity:

To bridge these gaps, several strategies can be employed. Developing age-specific datasets that capture the nuances of pediatric and geriatric health is critical for building robust AI models. Collaboration between healthcare institutions, technology developers, and policymakers can facilitate data sharing and standardization, enabling more comprehensive and representative training sets.

Interdisciplinary collaboration is essential for designing AI systems that are sensitive to the unique needs of each population. Clinicians, data scientists, ethicists, and patient representatives should work together to ensure that AI tools align with clinical workflows and respect patient autonomy. Explainable AI frameworks can enhance trust by providing transparent justifications for model outputs, fostering clinician acceptance and patient understanding.

Regulatory agencies should develop guidelines that address the specific challenges of AI deployment in pediatric and geriatric care. These guidelines should encompass data governance, consent mechanisms, and mechanisms for monitoring algorithmic bias. Funding mechanisms that prioritize research in underrepresented populations can incentivize the development of equitable AI solutions.

Conclusion:

AI holds immense potential to transform pediatric and geriatric healthcare by enabling early disease detection, personalized interventions, and improved patient outcomes. However, the unique clinical, ethical, and technical considerations of these populations necessitate tailored approaches to AI design and deployment. By investing in representative data collection, interdisciplinary collaboration, explainable AI frameworks, and supportive regulatory environments, stakeholders can ensure that AI innovations are equitable, effective, and patient-centered. Bridging the AI adoption gap in pediatric and geriatric healthcare requires a commitment to inclusivity, transparency, and continuous innovation to truly harness the transformative power of technology for all ages.

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