

One (big) step to reclaim the joy in medicine

AI ambient listening tool allows physicians to put more focus on patients

Pediatrician Mike Endris, MD, has been using a new ambient listening tool for medical appointments for the past six months. And, since then, he hasn't had to stay late at the office once. He now has time for other tasks, including teaching medical residents and responding more quickly to messages in his OSF MyChart (patient access portal) inbox.

He has been given the gift of time through technology. OSF HealthCare has been piloting a generative AI-powered clinical documentation tool from Microsoft, DAX Copilot, that is embedded into a patient's electronic health record (EHR). DAX is an acronym for Dragon Ambient eXperience.

The technology records and transcribes patient visits before drafting a clinical note for the medical record. Patients are asked to give consent and Dr. Endris says most do, once he explains their information is being kept on a secure platform that complies with all privacy requirements in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

Dr. Endris loves the ability now to be completely focused on his conversations during medical visits and he believes DAX Copilot is easing physician burnout.

"Things got busier, more of the visit and the documentation needed to be done almost in real time to be able to stay on schedule and to be able to go home in a timely hour and not be stuck, charting while I'm sitting at home in my pajamas. So this has definitely allowed that to be a reality for us."

The technology uses specific templates that are trained for a certain type of specialty, so the artificial intelligence understands what's important during the visit. That really impressed Dr. Endris.

"In pediatrics, we obviously talk about school a lot, and it tends to pull in that relevant information, whereas, if you're talking to somebody else about school, it's probably not putting that in a urology note or what have you."

Tyler Fitch, MD, chief medical information officer for OSF HealthCare/Pointcore, who is helping oversee the implementation of the technology in medical and specialty offices, says to date, 150 physicians have used DAX Copilot. Most are impressed with the accuracy and quality of the notes generated. All providers review and have the option of changing notes before making the summary a permanent part of a person's medical record. Dr. Fitch says most users don't find themselves changing much in the notes.

"They said it made them 'giddy' with how good it was. It made them 'sound very smart', and they felt like it included a lot of details they're sure they would have forgotten if they were writing the note themselves."

During the six months of the pilot, data shows users were getting back 30-40 minutes per day that was spent on notes and including after hours, referred to as 'pajama time.' Dr. Fitch reports it's helping doctors feel excited about their career again.

"As you heard from Dr. Endris, he can really focus on talking to the person rather than having to worry, multitask at the same time... because you can really trust it. You can actually engage in the conversation. That brings the joy or the vision people have going to medical school – it is not simply writing notes and talking to patients, (but) helping them."

Feedback from more than 1,000 OSF HealthCare patients where the ambient listening technology was used showed 96% said they felt doctors were more engaged during their appointment. But, OSF has not made it mandatory for providers to use the tool.

OSF HealthCare is still in the process of gathering data, particularly as it continues to launch the technology in additional medical offices. An important data point will be whether providers think they'll be able to see more

patients in a day, therefore opening up access and reducing wait times for people to get the care they need. Dr. Endris says that has been the case for some providers in the pediatrics office in Bloomington, Illinois, where he practices. As he put it, "It's a real game changer."

Dr. Fitch agrees the technology is transformative.

"To analogize this to something like maybe in farming, this is like the invention of a tractor. This makes stuff happen that previously took a lot of extra labor ... that automates it and allows you to be doing other things or to do much more scale. And so this is a huge deal for our providers, which is why you're hearing so many, so many comments like that."

OSF HealthCare will be among the first health systems to try a new feature called DAX Copilot Orders that will, for example, generate orders for the providers to review and sign off based on what was said during the appointment. A pilot for that new feature launches this spring.