The Malaysian Medical Association's Position Paper on AI & Digitalization in Healthcare

By Dr. June Lau (AI in Healthcare and Digital Health Committee 2024-2025)
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Preamble

The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) recognizes the transformative role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digitalization in healthcare and supports the Malaysian government's initiatives to integrate AI responsibly. While AI presents opportunities to enhance patient care and healthcare efficiency, it also raises concerns regarding patient safety, data security, professional autonomy, and workforce well-being.

MMA firmly believes that AI should serve as a tool to support and augment clinical decision-making and not replace the essential role of doctors in delivering patient care. As Malaysia moves forward with its National AI Policy and digital healthcare strategies, the MMA calls for clear regulatory oversight, ethical implementation of AI, and champions involvement of medical professionals in the involvement of AI governance.

This position statement outlines MMA's key priorities in ensuring AI adoption in healthcare aligns with the government's vision while safeguarding the interests of doctors, patients, and the healthcare system.

Guiding Principles

1. Supporting Ethical AI Innovation in Healthcare

MMA supports AI-driven healthcare initiatives that are evidence-based, transparent, and patient-centered, including:

I. The role of the National AI Office in accelerating AI adoption, fostering innovation, and ensuring ethical development of artificial intelligence.

II. AI-powered tools to improve early disease detection, improving patient outcomes and reducing healthcare burden.

III. Encouraging AI-assisted clinical decision support systems that enhance diagnostic accuracy, personalize treatment planning, and support clinicians in delivering high-quality care.

However, MMA emphasizes the following safeguards:

I. All AI applications in healthcare, particularly those involved in diagnosis, treatment, or patient monitoring—must undergo rigorous validation in accordance with local/international guidelines, including clinical trials when appropriate, to ensure their safety, efficacy, and clinical relevance prior to deployment.

II. AI-driven decisions must be explainable, transparent, and interpretable by doctors.

III. AI should not replace human clinical judgment—doctors must retain ultimate responsibility and decision-making authority in patient care.

MMA opposes any AI-driven policies that would:

I. Reduce doctors to mere data interpreters, limiting their professional autonomy.
II. Compromise patient safety by relying solely on AI recommendations without human oversight.
III. Promote the use of untested AI solutions in clinical practice without appropriate regulatory approval.

2. AI as a Tool to Reduce Burnout and Improve Work Conditions

MMA advocates the adoption of AI technologies that improves working conditions and improve the efficiency of patient care, particularly in the public healthcare sector where doctor shortages and burnout remain pressing challenges.

AI should be used to reduce administrative burdens on doctors by automating routine and time-consuming tasks such as:

I. Electronic Health Records (EHRs) management to improve documentation efficiency.
II. AI-driven patient scheduling system to reduce waiting times.
III. Automated reporting and imaging analysis to assist radiologists and pathologists.

MMA strongly opposes AI-driven cost-cutting measures that would:

I. Increase workload expectations for doctors without corresponding workforce expansion or support.
II. Lead to reduced employment opportunities for doctors in favor of AI automation, thus undermining the role of qualified healthcare professionals in delivering safe and effective care.
III. Decrease face-to-face doctor-patient interactions, compromising holistic patient care.

3. Ensuring Strong Data Privacy & Ethical AI Use in Medicine

As AI adoption expands, data privacy and security must remain a top priority. MMA demands strict governance to ensure patient data is protected from misuse, breaches, and unauthorized access.

MMA calls for:

I. AI compliance with Malaysia's Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA) to protect patient confidentiality.
II. Transparency in AI-driven decisions, ensuring patients are informed when AI is used in their treatment.
III. Strict policies on AI-driven patient monitoring to prevent privacy violations
IV. The development of a comprehensive legislative framework as a replacement to the Telemedicine Act 1997 to reflect the current and emerging technologies in digital health, including AI, remote care, and connected medical devices.
V. Centralize, regularly updated list by the Ministry of Health of validated AI tools for use in medical practice.
VI. The Malaysia Medical Council (MMC) to play an active role in enforcing data privacy and ethical standards in the use of AI and digital tools within medical practice.
VII. The formation of a multi-stakeholder working group, comprising representatives from the public sector, private industry, academia, and professional bodies to examine and provide guidance on liability, accountability, and risk management in the use of AI in healthcare.

MMA opposes any AI model that:

I. Uses patient data without explicit informed consent.
II. Allows private or foreign entities to control Malaysian health data without oversight.
III. Enables AI-generated diagnoses or treatments without human verification.

4. Training & Upskilling Doctors in AI & Digital Healthcare

As AI becomes integrated into clinical practice, doctors must be equipped with the necessary digital skills to navigate AI-powered tools effectively.

MMA urges the government to invest in AI literacy programs by:

I. Incorporating AI education into medical school curriculums.
II. Providing AI training as part of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for all doctors.
III. Ensuring AI is developed in collaboration with medical professionals, not just technologists.

MMA strongly rejects any mandatory AI implementation without proper training for healthcare professionals.

5. Involving Doctors in AI Policy & Decision-Making

MMA firmly believes that doctors should play a key role in shaping Malaysia's AI healthcare policies.

MMA calls for:

I. Doctor representation in the National AI Office and AI policymaking bodies.
II. Stakeholder engagement between the Ministry of Health, MMA, and AI developers before AI deployment.
III. National funding for AI research in medicine, ensuring AI innovation addresses real clinical challenges.

MMA rejects any AI policies that:

I. Are designed without medical professional input

II. Prioritize commercial or industry interests over patient safety.
III. Compromise doctor-patient trust through excessive reliance on AI.

Conclusion: MMA's Commitment to Ethical AI in Healthcare

The MMA is committed to working collaboratively alongside the Malaysian government to ensure AI enhances, rather than disrupts, the healthcare system. Our stance is clear:

I. AI must serve as a tool to support, not replace, doctors.
II. AI policies must uphold patient safety, medical ethics, and professional autonomy of healthcare providers.
III. Doctors must be equipped with the necessary knowledge and training to engage with AI and play an active role in AI policymaking.

As Malaysia advances its National AI Strategy, MMA will continue to monitor, advocate, and safeguard the role of doctors while ensuring AI serves the best interests of patients, healthcare professionals, and the public health system.

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