

NHS partnership with Google's DeepMind AI tool raises privacy concerns

Royal Free Hospital using new 'Streams' service



NHS and Google work to use AI for health treatments



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The tension between using technology to improve healthcare versus the privacy risks this poses has risen its head once again, after Google revealed its AI engine DeepMind is using NHS data to help diagnose patients with major health risks.

While on the face of it it's a medical leap forward privacy campaigners are continuing to express concern over the amount of medical data that potentially gives Google access to.

Doctors at the Royal Free Hospital in London have been using DeepMind, the artificial intelligence (AI) arm of Google's Alphabet, claiming it can free up over half a million hours per year, currently spent on paperwork, which could be redirected into actual patient care.

Instead of constantly bringing in patients with kidney conditions, DeepMind will send "breaking news" alerts to doctors when a patient in their charge has a likelihood of heading towards a kidney episode, or other life-threatening conditions, through to complete organ failure.

The app being provided to patients is called 'Streams', and although it offers encryption at both ends and the data won't be shared with Google, some people are still worried..

The deal was first announced back in May and resulted in an investigation from the Information Commissioners Office. More recently, Moorfield Eye Hospital has confirmed it is looking into using DeepMind for similar purposes.

This pilot scheme may well become monetised in the future, if successful, but because of the sheer ease of using an app over using rifling through notes and the compute power of being able to spot patterns, it could be that the result saves lives and millions of pounds.

Talking to the BBC, a spokesman from lobby group Med Confidential said: "Our concern is that Google gets data on every patient who has attended the hospital in the last five years and they're getting a big monthly report of data on every patient who was in the hospital."

But Professor Jane Dacre, president of the Royal College of Physicians retorts, said patient confidentiality was always top priority.

"Whenever we develop new ways of using patient data, it is essential that safeguards are in place for appropriateness and confidentiality, but with these we should embrace the opportunity to improve healthcare quality and reduce the burdens of bureaucracy on clinicians so they can focus on their patients."

The Streams pilot programme will be rolled out early in the new year.

<http://www.v3.co.uk/v3-uk/news/2478306/nhs-partnership-with-googles-deepmind-ai-tool-raises-privacy-concerns>