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The Digital Stethoscope Newsletter

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Trust is Earned: Human Judgment in an AI-Enabled World

Welcome to the June issue of *The Digital Stethoscope*.

This month, I want to talk about something that sits underneath every conversation we are having about artificial intelligence in healthcare: trust. Not necessarily trust in the technology itself, but trust in the people using it.

Over the past several months, we have followed an important progression together. We explored leadership, accountability, and competency, all critical pieces of preparing nursing for an AI-enabled future. But now the conversation moves somewhere even more foundational, because none of those things matter if trust is lost.

Healthcare has always depended on trust between patients, professionals, and the systems designed to support care. Patients trust that clinicians will recognize what matters, apply sound judgment, and make decisions with their best interests at the center. Artificial intelligence does not remove that responsibility; if anything, it intensifies it.

As AI-generated recommendations become more embedded in clinical decision support, documentation systems, workflow prioritization, and educational environments, something important is happening. Technology is becoming faster, more polished, and increasingly confident in the information it presents. But confidence is not the same as trustworthiness, and that distinction matters.

An AI-generated recommendation may sound convincing, appear complete, and even be statistically accurate. Yet healthcare decisions are never made in averages or generalizations. They are made with this patient, in this moment, under these specific circumstances, and that is where nursing practice lives.

What is emerging now is not simply the question of whether AI works. The deeper question is whether professionals can demonstrate that its use remains safe, thoughtful, transparent, and grounded in clinical judgment. Trust in healthcare is not built by automation alone; it is built by professionals who are willing to question what does not make sense, recognize what may be missing, and remain accountable for the decisions they make.

This is where the role of nursing becomes even more essential. Nurses are not passive recipients of AI-generated information, they are the human safeguard within increasingly technology-enabled systems. Patients may never see the algorithm behind the recommendation, but they will always experience the consequences of the decisions made around it.

In this issue, we will explore what it means to preserve trust in an AI-enabled world. We will look at why human judgment matters more than ever, how trust is reinforced through visible oversight, and what educators and leaders can do to prepare nurses for this responsibility. Because in the end, trust is not defined by the technology itself; it is defined by the professionals willing to evaluate it, question it, and stand behind the decisions made when using it.

Where AI informs... trust is built through judgment.

 Susan

Spotlight Feature:



“The Trust Gap:

Why Human Judgment Matters More Than Ever”

Artificial intelligence is becoming increasingly integrated into the environments where nurses practice, teach, document, communicate, and make decisions. In many settings, AI-generated recommendations now appear seamlessly within workflows, often presented with speed, confidence, and the appearance of certainty. As a result, an important challenge is emerging: distinguishing between information that appears trustworthy and information that has truly been evaluated within the clinical context.

This is where the trust gap begins.

The trust gap is not simply about whether AI systems are accurate. It is about what happens when technology-generated outputs are accepted too quickly, relied upon too heavily, or assumed to be correct because they sound authoritative. In healthcare, confidence can be persuasive, but persuasive is not always safe.

Nurses understand this instinctively because clinical practice has never depended on information alone. It depends on interpretation, context, judgment, and the ability to recognize when something does not align with the full picture of the patient. AI may generate recommendations, but it cannot fully understand nuance, uncertainty, competing priorities, or the lived realities surrounding care decisions.

One of the greatest risks emerging in AI-enabled environments is automation bias, the tendency to trust or favor technology-generated recommendations even when clinical concerns are present. This does not happen because clinicians lack competence. It happens because human beings naturally associate speed, sophistication, and consistency with accuracy.

The danger is subtle.

When recommendations are delivered confidently, it becomes easier to assume they have already been fully validated. Over time, this can create a gradual shift where questioning decreases, reflection shortens, and independent analysis becomes less visible. The risk is not only incorrect recommendations; the risk is the erosion of the professional judgment that protects patients when technology is incomplete, biased, or wrong.

Trust in healthcare has never been based solely on information. It has always been based on professional accountability. Patients trust nurses not because they have access to data, but because they believe nurses will interpret that information carefully, recognize what matters, and act responsibly when situations are uncertain or complex.

That responsibility becomes even more important in AI-enabled care environments.

The nurse who pauses to question a recommendation, verify an inconsistency, or reconsider an AI-generated suggestion is not slowing down care. That nurse is reinforcing safety. In many ways, visible human judgment is becoming one of the most important safeguards within modern healthcare systems.

This is why trust cannot be delegated entirely to technology.

AI systems may support prioritization, organize information, identify patterns, and accelerate workflows. However, they do not carry professional responsibility for the decisions made from those outputs. They do not assume accountability for outcomes, communicate empathy to patients, or recognize when something simply “does not feel right” clinically.

Nurses do.

As AI becomes more embedded into practice, trust will increasingly depend on whether human oversight remains visible. Can clinicians explain why a recommendation was accepted, modified, or rejected? Is clinical reasoning still evident in communication and documentation? Are professionals prepared to recognize the limitations, gaps, or biases within AI-generated information?

These questions matter because trust is not created by the presence of technology alone. Trust is reinforced when professionals demonstrate thoughtful evaluation, clear reasoning, and accountability within environments where technology is influencing decisions.

This is where nursing practice becomes central.

Nurses serve as the bridge between technology-generated information and patient-centered care. They contextualize recommendations, identify what may be missing, recognize risks that algorithms cannot fully appreciate, and ensure that decisions remain grounded in human judgment. In doing so, they preserve something healthcare cannot function without: trust.

The future of AI in healthcare will not be determined solely by how advanced the technology becomes. It will be determined by whether professionals continue to demonstrate the judgment, oversight, and accountability necessary to use it responsibly.

Because in the end, trust is not built by the algorithm.

It is built by the professional willing to question it.

Trending Topics:



“The Conversation is Shifting from Adoption to Trustworthiness”

The discussion around artificial intelligence in healthcare continues to evolve rapidly, but one important shift is becoming increasingly clear. Organizations are no longer focused solely on whether AI can improve efficiency or support decision-making. The conversation is now expanding toward something much bigger: whether AI systems can be trusted within environments where patient safety, professional accountability, and ethical decision-making are at stake.

Across healthcare and nursing education, the expectation is changing. It is no longer enough to simply implement AI tools or encourage their use. Leaders, educators, clinicians, and organizations are now being asked to demonstrate how AI-informed decisions remain safe, transparent, and grounded in human oversight.

Several important trends are shaping this shift.

◆ Explainability Is Becoming Essential

One of the growing concerns surrounding AI in healthcare is the issue of explainability. Clinicians are increasingly being asked to trust recommendations generated by systems that may not clearly reveal how conclusions were reached. When professionals cannot fully explain why an output was generated, trust becomes more difficult to sustain.

As a result, organizations are beginning to recognize that transparency matters just as much as performance. Healthcare professionals need to understand not only what AI is recommending, but also the factors influencing those recommendations. The ability to question, interpret, and explain AI-supported decisions is becoming part of responsible practice.

◆ Automation Bias Is Receiving Greater Attention

Researchers and healthcare leaders are paying closer attention to automation bias and its impact on clinical decision-making. There is growing recognition that even highly skilled professionals may gradually place too much trust in AI-generated outputs, particularly when systems appear polished, fast, and highly confident.

This concern is shifting conversations in both education and practice settings. The focus is no longer simply on teaching clinicians how to use AI tools. Increasingly, the emphasis is on teaching professionals how to critically evaluate those tools, recognize limitations, and maintain independent clinical reasoning even when technology appears certain.

◆ Trustworthy AI Frameworks Are Emerging

Healthcare systems, accrediting bodies, and policy organizations are placing greater emphasis on the concept of trustworthy AI. This includes expectations related to transparency, reliability, fairness, bias mitigation, accountability, and human oversight.

Importantly, trustworthiness is not being defined solely by technical performance. It is also being defined by how AI is governed, monitored, evaluated, and integrated into professional workflows. Organizations are recognizing that trust is not created by the technology alone, but by the systems and professionals responsible for overseeing it.

◆ Public Trust Is Becoming a Major Concern

Patients are hearing more about artificial intelligence in healthcare than ever before. Media coverage continues to highlight both innovation and risk, often raising questions about safety, privacy, bias, and the potential loss of human connection in care delivery.

As public awareness grows, healthcare organizations are recognizing that patient trust cannot be assumed. Patients want reassurance that technology is supporting care rather than replacing thoughtful human judgment. This places nursing in a particularly important position, because nurses remain one of the most trusted professions and often serve as the human connection patients rely on most.

◆ Human Oversight Expectations Are Increasing

The expectation for visible human oversight is becoming more explicit across healthcare environments. Organizations are beginning to ask important operational questions:

- Who evaluates AI-generated recommendations?
- How is clinical judgment demonstrated?
- When should outputs be questioned or escalated?
- How is accountability documented?

These questions reflect a growing understanding that safe AI integration requires more than adoption. It requires clearly defined professional responsibility.

◆ Nursing Education Is Shifting Toward Trust Calibration

In educational settings, faculty are increasingly exploring how to prepare students to interact thoughtfully with AI-supported information. This includes helping students learn when to trust technology, when to verify information independently, and when to recognize that something may not align with the clinical picture.

clinical alert, documentation suggestion, predictive risk score, or workflow recommendation, the nurse considers the information within the context of the patient's condition, assessment findings, history, and trajectory.

This evaluation process may only take moments, but it demonstrates something essential: technology is informing care, not independently directing it.

Visible evaluation also helps prevent automation bias. When nurses intentionally question whether recommendations align with the clinical picture, they reinforce professional accountability and maintain independent clinical reasoning even in fast-paced environments.

Communication Makes Judgment Visible

Trust is strengthened when clinical reasoning is communicated clearly within the healthcare team. In AI-enabled environments, it is becoming increasingly important for nurses to articulate not only what decisions were made, but how those decisions were reached.

This can be as simple as saying:

- “The AI alert flagged deterioration risk, but the current assessment findings remain stable.”
- “The recommendation was reviewed, but additional patient factors needed to be considered.”
- “The output supported the concern, but clinical judgment guided the intervention priority.”

These conversations reinforce that AI-supported care still requires thoughtful professional interpretation. They also create transparency within team decision-making and help maintain shared situational awareness.

Documentation Is Becoming Evidence of Oversight

Documentation has always reflected patient care. Increasingly, it is also becoming evidence of clinical oversight in AI-enabled systems.

When nurses document assessment findings, rationale, reassessment, escalation, or decisions that modified or overrode AI-generated suggestions, they demonstrate visible accountability. This does not require lengthy explanations or technical language. It requires making clinical reasoning evident within the patient record.

The goal is not to document the technology itself. The goal is to document the professional evaluation surrounding its use.

Questioning Reinforces Safety

One of the strongest indicators of trustworthy practice is the willingness to question recommendations that do not align with the patient’s condition or clinical judgment. Nurses have always served as a critical safety layer within healthcare systems, and that role becomes even more important when technology-generated outputs are involved.

Questioning does not mean rejecting AI. It means recognizing that no system is perfect and that professional oversight remains essential. Nurses who escalate concerns, verify inconsistencies, or seek clarification when something does not make sense are actively reinforcing patient safety and preserving trust in care delivery.

Teaching Trustworthy Practice in Education

In nursing education, these same principles must be taught intentionally. Students need opportunities to practice evaluating AI-supported information rather than simply receiving it as correct. Faculty can strengthen this skill by incorporating reflective prompts such as:

- “What made this recommendation appear trustworthy?”
- “What additional information would you want before acting?”
- “Would you make the same decision without the AI recommendation?”
- “What concerns or limitations should be considered here?”

These questions encourage students to develop trust calibration, the ability to appropriately evaluate when technology should be trusted, questioned, verified, or reconsidered.

Top 5 Behaviors That Make Trust Visible

1. Pause Before Accepting Recommendations

Trustworthy practice begins with intentional evaluation, not automatic acceptance.

2. Interpret Information Within the Full Clinical Context

AI outputs are one source of information, not the entire clinical picture.

3. Communicate Clinical Reasoning Clearly

Visible judgment strengthens team understanding and reinforces accountability.

4. Document the Evaluation Process

The patient record should reflect professional oversight, not just actions taken.

5. *Question What Does Not Align*

Thoughtful questioning reinforces safety, critical thinking, and patient advocacy.

As AI continues to evolve, trust in healthcare will increasingly depend on whether professionals remain visibly engaged in the decision-making process. Technology may support efficiency, organization, and pattern recognition, but trust is ultimately reinforced through human judgment, accountability, and thoughtful care.

For nursing, this is not a new responsibility. It is a more visible expression of what the profession has always done best.

Because in the end, trust is not preserved by the technology itself.

It is preserved by the professional willing to evaluate it carefully before acting.

Educator's Toolbox:

"Teaching Students to Question Confident Technology"



Artificial intelligence is already present in the learning environment, whether faculty formally integrate it or not. Students are using generative AI tools to organize information, summarize content, answer questions, draft assignments, and support clinical preparation. At the same time, healthcare environments are increasingly integrating AI-supported documentation systems, predictive tools, and clinical decision-support technologies into everyday workflows.

This means nursing education is no longer preparing students for a future where AI *might* exist. We are preparing students for practice environments where AI-generated information will be routine.

The challenge for educators is not simply deciding whether students should use AI. The more important question is whether students can recognize when AI-generated information should be trusted, questioned, verified, or reconsidered.

That distinction matters greatly.

One of the emerging concerns in both education and healthcare is the tendency for students and professionals to assume that polished, confident, or detailed AI-generated responses are

inherently correct. In reality, AI systems can generate inaccurate, incomplete, biased, or contextually inappropriate information while still sounding highly convincing.

This creates an important responsibility for nurse educators.

We are no longer teaching students only how to locate information. We are teaching them how to critically evaluate information that may appear highly authoritative on the surface. In many ways, the role of faculty is becoming less about gatekeeping access to AI and more about developing thoughtful skepticism, clinical reasoning, and visible judgment.

Shift the Focus from Use to Evaluation

One of the most effective ways to support this shift is by redesigning assignments to evaluate *how students think* rather than simply what they produce. Instead of focusing primarily on whether AI was used, faculty can ask students to explain how they evaluated AI-generated content and why certain information was accepted, modified, or rejected.

This transforms AI from a shortcut into a tool for developing professional reasoning.

Students can be asked to:

- identify where AI influenced their work
- explain how outputs were verified
- describe what concerns or limitations they recognized
- justify final decisions using evidence and clinical reasoning
- reflect on whether they would trust the information in actual patient care

These types of assignments help students practice discernment rather than dependency.

Teach Students to Recognize “Confidently Wrong” Information

One of the most valuable learning opportunities may come from intentionally exposing students to AI-generated inaccuracies. Faculty can provide examples of polished but flawed AI-generated case summaries, patient education materials, or clinical recommendations and ask students to identify what appears problematic or incomplete.

These activities help students understand an important reality: information that sounds confident is not always trustworthy.

This skill becomes especially important in healthcare environments where AI-generated recommendations may appear authoritative simply because they are integrated into official systems or presented quickly and efficiently.

Use Reflection Questions That Strengthen Judgment

Sometimes the most powerful teaching strategy is simply asking better questions. Faculty can incorporate reflective prompts into discussions, simulation debriefings, care planning activities, or written assignments that encourage students to pause and think critically about AI-supported information.

Examples include:

- “What made this answer appear trustworthy?”
- “What information might be missing here?”
- “Would you make the same decision without the AI recommendation?”
- “What concerns would you want to clarify before acting?”
- “How would you verify this information in practice?”

These questions shift students away from passive acceptance and toward active clinical reasoning.

Simulation Creates Safe Opportunities to Practice Trust Calibration

Simulation and case-based learning provide excellent opportunities for students to practice evaluating AI-generated information in realistic clinical contexts. Faculty can integrate AI-supported recommendations, documentation drafts, predictive alerts, or prioritization suggestions into scenarios and ask students to decide how they would respond.

Importantly, debriefing should focus not only on the clinical outcome, but on the student’s reasoning process:

- Why did they trust the recommendation?
- What concerns did they notice?
- What additional assessment or validation was needed?
- How did AI influence their thinking?

This helps students develop trust calibration, the ability to appropriately decide when technology should be trusted, questioned, or verified.

Model Thoughtful AI Use as Faculty

Students learn a great deal from observing how educators use AI themselves. Faculty do not need to avoid AI completely to model professionalism. In fact, transparent and thoughtful use may be one of the strongest teaching strategies available.

Educators can briefly describe how AI-generated content was reviewed, refined, verified, or modified before being shared. Statements such as:

- “I used AI to help organize ideas, but I reviewed the content carefully for accuracy.”

- “This draft was AI-assisted, but clinical examples and references were added afterward.”
- “I verified this information against current evidence before including it.”

These simple explanations reinforce that responsible AI use always includes human oversight.

Teaching Trustworthy Practice Is Now Part of Professional Preparation

The goal of nursing education is not to prepare students to rely on AI. It is to prepare them to think critically in environments where AI will increasingly influence information, workflows, and decision-making.

That preparation requires more than technical familiarity. It requires judgment, reflection, accountability, and the confidence to question information that may appear certain on the surface.

Because in practice, students will not be evaluated on whether they used AI.

They will be accountable for the decisions they make when using it.



Closing Note *Trust Still Depends on Us*

Artificial intelligence will continue to evolve. Systems will become faster, more integrated, more predictive, and increasingly embedded into the everyday environments where nurses practice, teach, document, and lead. The pace of change is unlikely to slow, and in many ways, healthcare is only beginning to understand how significantly AI will influence the future of care delivery.

But even as technology advances, one thing remains unchanged.

Patients still look to healthcare professionals for reassurance, guidance, judgment, and safety. They trust that someone is thoughtfully evaluating the information in front of them, recognizing what matters, and making decisions with their best interests at the center. That trust has always been foundational to nursing practice, and it becomes even more important in environments where technology increasingly influences recommendations and workflows.

Throughout this issue, we explored the growing importance of trust in AI-enabled healthcare. Not blind trust in the technology itself, but trust in the professionals responsible for evaluating

how that technology is used. Because the future of safe AI integration will not be determined solely by how sophisticated systems become; it will be determined by whether human judgment remains visible within the process.

That visibility matters.

When nurses pause to question recommendations that do not align with the patient's condition, trust is reinforced. When clinical reasoning is communicated clearly within teams, trust is strengthened. When professionals demonstrate thoughtful evaluation instead of automatic acceptance, patients, colleagues, and organizations are reminded that accountability remains grounded in human oversight.

This is not about resisting innovation.

Nursing has always adapted to changing technologies, evolving systems, and new models of care. The profession does not move forward by rejecting progress, it moves forward by ensuring that progress remains aligned with safety, ethics, critical thinking, and patient-centered care.

Artificial intelligence can support efficiency, identify patterns, organize information, and assist decision-making. But it cannot replace the professional responsibility required to interpret information within the full complexity of human care. It cannot fully understand nuance, competing priorities, emotional context, or the lived experiences patients bring into healthcare encounters every day.

Nurses do.

That is why the role of nursing is becoming even more important in this next chapter of healthcare transformation. Not because nurses are competing against technology, but because the profession provides something technology alone cannot: thoughtful judgment grounded in accountability, compassion, context, and trust.

As AI continues to evolve, perhaps one of the most important questions we can continue asking ourselves is not simply:
“Can this technology do more?”

But rather:

“How do we ensure trust remains visible when it does?”

Because trust in healthcare has never depended solely on information. It depends on the professionals willing to evaluate it carefully, question it thoughtfully, and stand behind the decisions made when using it.

Where AI informs... trust still depends on us.

 **Susan**

