

2026 *Human Connection* *In the Age of AI*

AI is everywhere it would seem, including in mental health spaces. We are here to share some words of wisdom on what this new era entails.

Earlier this month I attended the Asia Pacific Employee Assistance Roundtable Conference in Seoul, where I heard the most brilliant minds speak about the use and implementation of AI in the mental health field.

I will be the first to admit to the deep skepticisms of AI. I came into this profession because of the irreplaceable empathy and compassion that entails. Especially in a world being dominated by AI, because, *how can something that is not a feeling, breathing, emoting thing possibly assist the world of mental health?* I believe real life human interaction is, and will always, be the best medicine for a human's overall wellbeing, and something that is irreplaceable in the counseling room.

As I entered the conference, my skepticism headlights were activated. However, as the days went on my curiosity to the possible benefits of AI opened. While I believe AI will never achieve the ability to empathize and care as mental health provider, I must acknowledge its vitality in providing the *bridge...the connection...* to give individuals, throughout the world, the support they need. As I walked out the doors of the conference, three powerful words were left ringing in my ears: *augment not replace*. In a world of uncertainty and instability, AI holds the powerful capacity to connect individuals with resources to support their mental and physical health. But that does not mean AI will ever replace what we as therapists... as counselors... as humans possess.

*With love,
Ally*

2026 *Human Connection* *In the Age of AI*

Trends range from people using chatbots for personal therapy to practitioners incorporating AI into their workflow. As a senior clinician, I find the concept of AI in mental health to be a subject of much debate, and rightly so.

Some providers have highlighted cases where adolescents turned to AI for reassurance regarding compulsive appearance checking behaviors. Without hesitation, chatbots have confirmed such behaviors as "normal" and even recommended aesthetic interventions. A trained practitioner, however, would address the possible underlying body dysmorphic traits, social anxiety, and self-worth. Even more concerning are cases where AI has failed to intervene—or worse, encouraged—self-harm ideation. There is no room for debate on the serious risks associated with AI being used for personal therapy.

Outside of clinical intervention, AI can be appropriate. I argue it is helpful for managing the complex business administration of an independent practice, such as drafting reminders and organizing workflow (and even polishing newsletters). However, even in research, where I would expect to find the most value in using AI, I have experienced it "hallucinating" citations, requiring considerable due diligence before I can put forward any product it produces.

While chatbots are ever-present and affordable, they cannot provide clinical rapport, human understanding, empathy, or authenticity. It is because of these human qualities that AI will never fully replace excellent providers.

While technology can serve as a supplementary tool, your mental well-being is deeply personal and deserves the nuanced, clinical care that only a professional can provide. The complexities of the human experience—ranging from the subtle indicators of social anxiety to the intricate layers of self-worth—require a level of sophisticated clinical judgment that remains beyond the reach of automated systems. If you are seeking a supportive environment that is genuinely authentic, deeply empathetic, and firmly grounded in years of clinical expertise, we invite you to take the next step in your mental health journey and reach out to us.

Contact Kintsugi Consulting today to schedule a comprehensive counseling session. Our approach is centered on creating a safe space where you can experience the profound and transformative value of true human connection, ensuring that your path toward healing is guided by a practitioner who truly understands the human condition. This clinical partnership provides the necessary oversight to navigate complex emotional landscapes that AI simply cannot fathom, fostering a relationship built on trust and professional accountability.

With love,
Dr. Abbey-Robin Durkin