

Letter to the Editor

Human touch in the age of AI: *Preserving the soul of medicine*



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In response to: Human touch in the age of AI: Preserving the soul of medicine¹

As a medical student in 1970, I learned a lesson: Be present for your patients. I have always aspired to emulate this counsel. This lesson was taught and role modeled by our venerated retired Chair of Medicine. The first thing he would do upon entering a patient's room was to ask if he could sit on the bed and, when given permission, he'd place his hand upon the patient's hand.

This acknowledgment of the patient, the laying of the hands, established a trusting interaction. This is the human connection so vividly displayed in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel fresco, *The Creation of Man*, depicting God giving life to Adam reaching out to touch fingers.

Dr. Sahithi Sharma's essay, "Human touch in the age of AI: Preserving the soul of medicine,"¹ accurately

characterizes the opposing tensions of data-driven medicine and human interaction that AI cannot achieve. I applaud Sharma's support of AI's ability to "calculate and code." I equally support Sharma's calling out the things AI cannot accomplish: sitting with the suffering patient, compassionately speaking to the patient and "not just to the symptoms;" "offering solace in silence;" and interacting with the patient on a human level to assure them they are not alone.¹

In a recent "A Piece of My Mind" article in *JAMA*, Benjamin Chin-Yee expands the failings of AI.² Chin-Yee strongly cautions against AI generated consult notes as they lack human storytelling and "...sense making-turning symptoms into stories, information into insight."²

We must constantly heed Sharma's message. We must be sure to teach and role model for our students and colleagues; "...AI must never replace our practice... AI will change how we deliver care. But it must never change why we care. The human touch is something we must not leave behind."¹

References

1. Sharma S. Human touch in the age of AI: Preserving the soul of medicine. *Pharos Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Med Soc*. Winter 2026; 89(1): 22–3
2. Chin-Yee B. AI In Medicine: The death of the consult note. *JAMA*. 335(10): 854–5

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