



# With a big gender gap in physician burnout, AI can help

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Despite advancements in gender equity in medicine, women physicians continue to fare more poorly on measures of well-being, often facing higher levels of burnout than their male counterparts. This inequity is exacerbated by the heavy administrative burdens that comes with the physician role, leaving many women doctors struggling to achieve and maintain a healthy work-life balance.

In 2023, 48.2% of physicians reported experiencing at least one symptom of burnout, down from 53% in 2022. Yet despite that drop in overall doctor burnout, 54.5% of women physicians reported experiencing symptoms of burnout compared with 42% of men.

But there is some hope on the horizon. The rise of augmented intelligence (AI)—often called artificial intelligence—offers the potential to help alleviate this burden and improve overall well-being. AI's ability to streamline administrative tasks and enhance practice efficiency offers a promising solution to reduce burnout among women physicians, paving the way for a more equitable and sustainable future in health care.

Women spend on average 41 minutes more per eight hours of patient scheduled time than men in the EHR, according to a *JAMA Network Open* article. This includes 10 more minutes spent doing work during nonscheduled hours, or "pajama time," and 31 more minutes writing notes.

"Even though we know women physicians often get more messages and spend more time with their patients, we still haven't put in interventions that have demonstrably changed that. But AI could help the workload go down," said AMA member Tina Shah, MD, MPH, a pulmonary and critical care physician who advises companies on how to address burnout. Dr. Shah also is chief clinical officer for Abridge, a company that uses AI to convert a patient-physician conversation into a structured clinical EHR note draft in real time.

"Our male counterparts need help with the burden too," she noted, but AI can especially help ease the burdens for women physicians, who she called "the most vulnerable, stretched-thin part of the



workforce.”

As AI continues to evolve, Dr. Shah shared some ways this technology can help reduce physician burnout, especially among women doctors.

## Reduce inbox volume

AI “has great promise,” Dr. Shah said, noting that “while in-basket message volume has gone up, it’s disproportionately gone up higher in women physicians, so there are discrepancies.”

“For women physicians, what I’d like to see is AI being used as a tool that’s an equalizer,” she said. “So, in this use case of excessive patient messages and other in-basket messages, we can use AI as an equalizer where it helps women not just have less administrative work, but also get to an equal level of total workload with their peers.”

## Improve clinical documentation

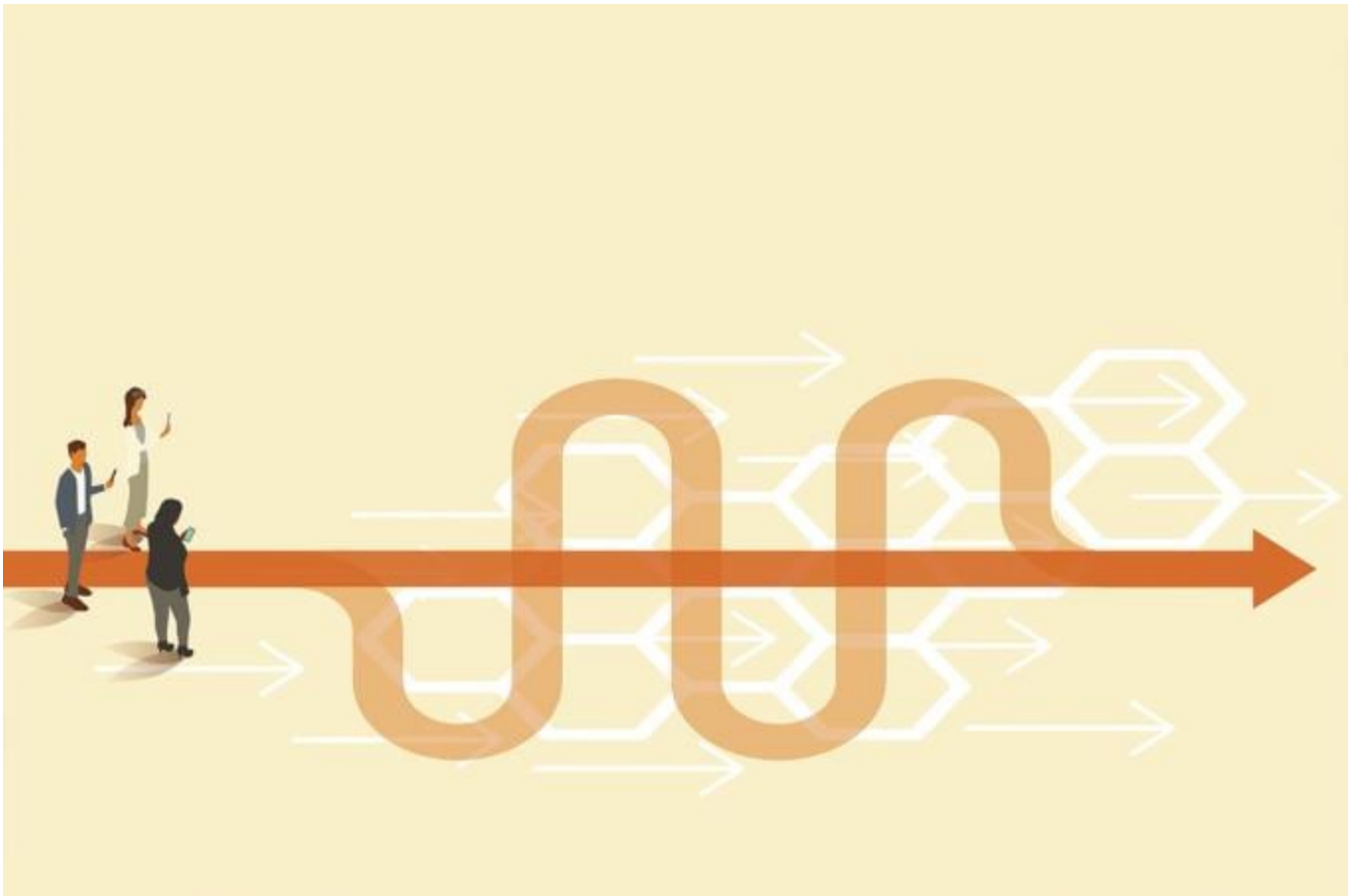
“There’s a sweet spot of tasks that physicians do that they do quite often and there are those tasks that are low value. And writing the clinical documentation is a great example of that,” Dr. Shah said. Through AI “there are some doctors who are saving up to three hours a day.”

“But the real question is what’s the real evidence behind all of that? For the average doctor, how much time are we saving? And which doctors particularly will benefit from this technology or not,” she said, noting that she is helping to conduct “landmark studies now” to uncover that information, “but our early data is showing substantial decreases in cognitive load, which is a precursor to moving the needle on burnout.”

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“Seeing a reduction in hours of work after work is incredible and a huge promise for physicians,” Dr. Shah said. “What I am worried about is certain places that already have more resources getting AI and other places where we’re serving the most vulnerable patients, not getting AI—how do we make sure we don’t widen the gap with equity by the deployment of this technology?”

## Enhance transparency

AI also has the potential to “help shed more light on” the gender inequities in burnout Dr. Shah said. “What if there are differences for women physicians than others? How do we better quantify what they’re doing differently?”

"Because research shows that patients cared for by female physicians have better survival and lower readmissions, wouldn't it be nice to use AI to figure out if it is about time spent or the amount of empathy and using ambient listening to characterize tone," she said.



With advancements in technology, “we can now get data to really provide evidence of the whole picture of work, particularly for women physicians and then use that to raise the tide on all boats,” Dr. Shah said.