

Healthcare Chatbots: Your 24/7 Digital Health Assistant

Healthcare is changing fast, and new technology is making it easier than ever to get the care you need. One of the newest tools that hospitals and doctors are using is a "chatbot"—think of it as a smart digital assistant that can help you with your healthcare needs day or night.

"Healthcare chatbots are transforming how patients interact with their healthcare providers," says Jonathan Witenko, Lee Health System Director of Virtual Health and Telemedicine. "These digital assistants help patients get the information and support they need, whenever they need it."

What are healthcare chatbots?

A healthcare chatbot is like having a helpful guide available on your phone or computer 24 hours a day. It's a computer program that can understand your questions and give you helpful answers about your health. While it's not a replacement for your doctor, it can help you with many basic healthcare needs.

"Chatbots are relatively new to healthcare," Jonathan explains, "but they've been widely used for years in other industries like retail, banking, and airlines. We're now bringing that same convenience to healthcare."

These digital assistants can:

- Help you schedule doctor appointments
- Answer common health questions
- Remind you to take your medications
- Guide you to the right type of care when you're not feeling well

How chatbots are making healthcare better

AI chatbots can detect patterns and trends in huge amounts of information, which makes them ideal for managing routine tasks such as scheduling appointments, sending medication reminders, and providing general health information. The benefits chatbots offer include:

Always there when you need help. "One of the biggest advantages of chatbots is their 24/7 availability," Jonathan explains. "Whether it's the middle of the night or a holiday weekend, patients can get immediate help with their healthcare needs."

Making healthcare more accessible. "Healthcare chatbots are breaking down barriers to access," Jonathan says, "especially for people in remote areas or those with mobility challenges."

Easier appointment scheduling. Instead of waiting on hold to schedule an appointment, chatbots let you book your visit quickly and easily. "This automation not only makes things more convenient for patients," Jonathan notes, "but it also helps reduce costs and minimize scheduling errors."

Help with symptoms. "While our [symptom checker](#) can't replace a doctor's visit," Jonathan emphasizes, "it's an excellent tool for helping patients understand their symptoms and decide what level of care they might need."

You're in control of your health. Chatbots help you become more involved in your healthcare. For example, he notes that during the COVID-19 pandemic, patients with a Lee Health MyChart account could access a free COVID-19 symptom checker.

Jonathan and his team at Lee Health are working on making chatbots even better. Here's what we can expect:

More natural and enhanced conversations. Future chatbots will be even better at understanding your questions, enhancing the accuracy of responses, and having natural conversations that feel more like talking to a real person.

Improved connection to your health records. Deeper integration with electronic health record (EHR) systems like Epic/MyChart will allow chatbots to access and analyze patient data in real time. "This will provide patients with more personalized advice based on their specific health history," Jonathan says.

Help with chronic disease management: "Chatbots will play a crucial role in monitoring chronic illnesses by regularly collecting patient data, such as symptoms, vital signs, and medication adherence," he says. This proactive approach leads to better patient outcomes and fewer complications."

Keeping your information secure and private. "At Lee Health, we take patient privacy very seriously," Jonathan emphasizes. "Our chatbots use strong security measures to protect all patient information."

Important things to remember

While chatbots are becoming more helpful in healthcare, they're not meant to replace your doctor.

"They're tools to help you get better access to healthcare and information," Jonathan says.
"For serious health concerns, you should always talk with your doctor."

Interested in other ways we're making healthcare more convenient? Learn more about our mobile app and all its features.

WATCH: [How the Lee Health MyChart Mobile App Works](#)

You can download the MyChart mobile app from [Google Play](#) or the [Apple App Store](#).