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The primary aim of Artificial Intelligence in Gastroenterology (AIG, Artif Intell Gastroenterol) is to provide scholars and readers from various fields of artificial intelligence in gastroenterology with a platform to publish high-quality basic and clinical research articles and communicate their research findings online.

AIG mainly publishes articles reporting research results obtained in the field of artificial intelligence in gastroenterology and covering a wide range of topics, including artificial intelligence in gastrointestinal cancer, liver cancer, pancreatic cancer, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, inflammatory bowel disease, irritable bowel syndrome, and Helicobacter pylori infection.

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EDITORIAL

Will artificial intelligence reach any limit in gastroenterology?

Joseph Bou Jaoude, Rose Al Bacha, Bassam Abboud

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Abstract

Endoscopy is the cornerstone in the management of digestive diseases. Over the last few decades, technology has played an important role in the development of this field, helping endoscopists in better detecting and characterizing luminal lesions. However, despite ongoing advancements in endoscopic technology, the incidence of missed pre-neoplastic and neoplastic lesions remains high due to the operator-dependent nature of endoscopy and the challenging learning curve associated with new technologies. Artificial intelligence (AI), an operator-independent field, could be an invaluable solution. AI can serve as a "second observer", enhancing the performance of endoscopists in detecting and characterizing luminal lesions. By utilizing deep learning (DL), an innovation within machine learning, AI automatically extracts input features from targeted endoscopic images. DL encompasses both computer-aided detection and computer-aided diagnosis, assisting endoscopists in reducing missed detection rates and predicting the histology of luminal digestive lesions. AI applications in clinical gastrointestinal diseases are continuously expanding and evolving the entire digestive tract. In all published studies, real-time AI assists endoscopists in improving the performance of non-expert gastroenterologists, bringing it to a level comparable to that of experts. The development of DL may be affected by selection biases. Studies have utilized different AI-assisted models, which are heterogeneous. In the future, algorithms need validation through large, randomized trials. Theoretically, AI has no limit to assist endoscopists in increasing the accuracy and the quality of endoscopic exams. However, practically, we still have a long way to go before standardizing our AI models to be accepted and applied by all gastroenterologists.

Key Words: Artificial intelligence; Digestive tract; Gastroenterology; Gastroscopy; Coloscopy

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Core Tip: The field of gastrointestinal endoscopy is an essential tool in the management of digestive diseases. Despite ongoing advancements in endoscopic technology, the incidence of missed pre-neoplastic and neoplastic lesions remains high. This is attributed to the operator-dependent nature of endoscopy, resulting in variability in detection rates and the characterization of lesions among endoscopists. To enhance endoscopic performance, it is imperative to minimize the "cognitive errors" made by the endoscopist. Artificial Intelligence, being operator-independent, could potentially serve as an unlimited solution.

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INTRODUCTION

The field of gastrointestinal (GI) endoscopy (GE) is an essential tool in the management of digestive diseases. Technology is essential for the advancement of endoscopy. Presently, white-light endoscopy (WLE) with high resolution stands as the standard technology that enables endoscopists to detect and characterize lesions more accurately. However, despite this, even expert endoscopists can overlook several lesions, including small and flat ones.

To morphologically predict the malignant potential of digestive lesions in real-time, several classification systems have been endorsed by scientific societies. These systems categorize lesions based on morphology (sessile, slightly raised, or excavated) or through a detailed examination of vascular and mucosal patterns using optical image-enhancing technology known as virtual chromo-endoscopy. Consequently, the assessment of invasion depth or lymph node involvement plays a crucial role in clinical decision-making, determining whether the lesion is surgically or endoscopically resectable.

Despite the ongoing development of endoscopic technology, the incidence of missed pre-neoplastic and neoplastic lesions remains high. This is attributed to the operator-dependent nature of endoscopy, resulting in variability in detection rates and the characterization of lesions among endoscopists. The existence of this skills gap can be explained by the extended learning curve associated with adopting new technologies.

To enhance the performance of the endoscopic procedure, it is imperative to minimize the "cognitive errors" made by the endoscopist. Artificial intelligence (AI), being operator-independent, could potentially serve as an unlimited solution.

As endoscopy fundamentally depends on high-quality images, it presents an appealing domain for AI, which comprises computer processes performing complex tasks to simulate the human brain. Alan Turing, one of AI's founders, defined = itas "the ability of a computer to achieve human performance in cognitive tasks". Thus, this concept combined the fields of medical knowledge and machine tools. Deep learning (DL) was innovated as a major transformation of machine learning (ML), allowing machines to learn and make decisions independently. DL automatically extracts input features from targeted images, demonstrating the ability to explore all pixels without experiencing transitory lapses in attention or fatigue. As a result, DL emerges as a promising technology, serving as a reliable "second observer" independent of the endoscopist's performance. DL encompasses two primary tasks: real-time detection or computer-aided detection (CADe) and real-time characterization or computer-aided diagnosis (CADx). Given that navigation software enhances mucosal exposure, CADe assists endoscopists in reducing the miss rate of lesion detection. Simultaneously, CADx aims to predict the histologic and optical diagnosis of pre-neoplastic lesions without the need for biopsy, as well as estimating the depth of invasion in malignant lesions to facilitate optimal therapeutic decision-making.

Moreover, DL can reduce the cost and the procedure time by abandoning random biopsies in favor of targeted ones and avoiding unnecessary resection of non-neoplastic lesions. DL can also evaluate the quality of endoscopic procedures by identifying parameters such as land marks, blind spots, measurement of withdrawal speed and mucosal cleansing assessment, making surveillance protocols more effective.

Thus, AI allows human-machine interaction, transferring expert knowledge to the entire gastroenterological community.

AI APPLICATIONS IN DIAGNOSTIC GE

AI applications in clinical GI diseases are continuously expanding and evolving into new areas. AI is embraced for its robust self-learning capability and unbiased nature. Real-time AI assists endoscopists throughout the entire digestive tract, including the upper, middle, and lower parts, as well as the hepato-biliary tree and pancreatic gland.

LOWER GITRACT

Colorectal polyps

In the GI field, the primary application of AI involves DL convolution neural network (CNN) models for detecting and diagnosing polyps during colonoscopy.

Detection of colorectal polyps using CADe: It has been established that the removal of pre-neoplastic polyps reduces the risk of colorectal cancer (CRC). However, endoscopy is operator-dependent, and the adenoma detection rate (ADR) varies widely from 7% to 53% among colonoscopists[1] while post-colonoscopy interval CRC constitutes nearly 8% of all diagnosed CRC[2]. The initial application of AI technology in GE was the detection of colorectal polyps, with most research focusing on the management of colorectal polyps. In 2018, Urban et al[3] and Misawa et al[4] reported the two earliest applications of CADe on video clips. Their algorithms demonstrated an accuracy of ≥90%. In 2019, Wang et al[5] conducted the first randomized controlled trial. Since then, numerous prospective randomized controlled trials [6-10], as well as meta-analyses[11], have been published, involving different AI systems and training. Consequently, CADe for polyp detection has been shown to increase the ADR, at least comparable to that assessed by experienced endoscopists, as recommended by the European Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ESGE) guidelines[12].

Characterization of colorectal polyps using CADx (polyp ≤ 5 mm): According to the current ESGE guidelines, polyps ≤ 5 mm with adenomatous structures need to be removed and sent for histopathological analysis. Diminutive polyps located in the recto-sigmoid, characterized as hyperplastic by virtual chromo-endoscopy, can either be "left in situ" or undergo the "resect and discard" approach. CADx tools, when combined with CADe, can assist endoscopists in real-time colonoscopy by distinguishing between neoplastic (adenoma or serrated) and non-neoplastic (hyperplastic) polyps. Consequently, in the case of non-neoplastic polyps, the "diagnose and leave" strategy reduces the need for polypectomy. Similarly, for neoplastic diminutive polyps, the "resect and discard" strategy minimizes the necessity for histopathological processing. In clinical practice, these two strategies, supported by CADe systems, contribute to reduced costs and procedure time. Indeed, many centers have developed CADx tools with WLE, narrow-band imaging (NBI), and endocystoscopy[13-15]. Their published results align with the parameters outlined by the American Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy Preservation and Incorporation of Valuable Endoscopic Innovation (PIVI).

Advanced subtle neoplastic (flat and serrated)

The increased detection of non-advanced adenomas alone cannot reduce the interval CRC. Consequently, developing AI systems to enhance the detection of advanced polyps is now considered a priority, as they pose the highest risk of developing CRC. Most CADx studies lack data about sessile serrated lesions (SSL) and flat polyps. When SSL are des-cribed, the majority is located in the recto-sigmoid and is diminutive. Only one recent prospective study, utilizing video datasets enriched with flat, SSL, and advanced colorectal polyps, evaluated AI performance against endoscopists. The AI-based algorithm achieves high per-polyp sensitivities for the diagnosis of advanced polyps[16].

Malignancy in colorectal polyps

Endoscopists must assess the level of submucosal invasion in T1 CRC without resorting to biopsy to decide whether to perform endoscopic or surgical resection. AI emerges as an ideal tool to offer valuable guidance to endoscopists. Two Japanese AI studies were conducted using CNN algorithms to differentiate between T1a and T1b. The initial study was a randomized one and achieved 94% of accuracy; however, the second one ranged only 81.4% of accuracy [17,18].

Computer-aided quality assessment of colonoscopy technique: AI, functioning as a virtual endoscopist, can complement the expertise of endoscopists in reducing the rate of missed polyps visible on the screen. However, the quality of a colonoscopy procedure relies on additional parameters such as incomplete mucosal exposure, blind spots, withdrawal speed, and the degree of bowel cleansing. Currently, AI is developing new systems to measure these parameters during the procedure, alongside CADe and CADx, to address exposure errors. Consequently, computer-aided quality assessment objectively evaluates the time spent exploring different segments of the colon, the quality of fold examination, and mucosal cleansing [19]. Therefore, in the future, we can objectively determine the quality of colonoscopy for the optimal surveillance protocol of CRC.

UPPER GITRACT

Esophagus

In a recent multicenter study of upper GI endoscopies, a 6.4% esophageal cancer miss rate was reported [20]. Due to the capability of DL to explore images beyond the reach of the human eye, it has been employed in the analysis of endoscopic images related to esophageal and stomach diseases. Wu et al[21] utilized a DL model and demonstrated promising outcomes in the classification and segmentation of individual esophageal lesions. Consequently, several CADe systems have been recently tested in clinical settings.

Precursor lesion of esophageal squamous cell neoplasia: Intrapapillary capillary loops (IPCL) observed through virtual chromoendoscopy (NBI) have been classified as a precancerous lesion of esophageal squamous cell neoplasia (ESCC), correlating with depth invasion. Everson et al [22] demonstrated that a DL model was an efficient, accurate, and reliable tool for classifying IPCL patterns as normal or abnormal. In two separate studies, Zhao et al[23] and Yuan et al[24] compared the accuracy of AI systems to that of endoscopists. AI models significantly enhance the ability of junior endoscopists to diagnose IPCL abnormalities and depth invasion of ESCC.

ESCC: A recent literature review demonstrated high diagnostic accuracy for AI in ESCC[25]. Extensive datasets have supported the overall diagnostic performance of AI for both superficial and advanced esophageal squamous cancer. Numerous studies have indicated that, AI accuracy in detection was comparable to or even higher than that experienced endoscopists[26-28]. In therapeutic decisions for ESCC, which depend on the depth of invasion, Zhang et al[29] conducted a multicenter study using an AI-based CADx model that simulated radiologists' diagnoses of lymph node metastasis. The results from AI systems significantly outperformed those of human diagnostics. Additionally, Tokai et al[30] published a comparative study between a DL CNN model and endoscopists to determine ESCC depth invasion. The results demonstrated that AI algorithms surpassed the performance of all endoscopists. Given these promising results, AI-assisted diagnostic techniques should be considered for adoption in future clinical practice.

Barrett's esophagus-related neoplasia: It is established that Barrett's esophagus (BE) is a precursor of esophageal adenocarcinoma (EAC). BE represents an exemplary application of AI systems, showcasing their capability in lesion identification and determining the degree of malignancy. Pan et al[31] demonstrated the ability of an AI model in identifying and classifying BE according to the Prague classification. To enable endoscopists to successfully detect dysplasia or EAC in BE, several AI studies have achieved high sensitivity, specificity, and accuracy, meeting the parameters outlined by the PIVI[32-35]. Two meta-analyses have reached similar conclusions[36,37].

To choose the optimal treatment, the identification of sub-mucosal invasion of BE-related neoplasia is mandatory. A retrospective multicenter study evaluated the performance of DL algorithms in discriminating between T1a and T1b cancer[38]. The AI model demonstrated comparable performance to experienced endoscopists.

Stomach

Gastric precancerous lesions: Helicobacter pylori (HP) infection can produce chronic atrophic gastritis (CAG) and gastric intestinal metaplasia (GIM). CAG and GIM are precancerous lesions associated with an increased risk of gastric cancer (GC) development[39]. Thus, endoscopic surveillance of the precancerous lesions is mandatory to detect GC in an early stage, termed early GC (EGC). The diagnosis of EGC is difficult because the sensitivity of endoscopic diagnosis of CAG is only 42% in a large study and the overall rate of missed neoplasia at endoscopy varies between 8.3% and 10%[40].

AI models may improve the diagnostic accuracy and aid the endoscopist in the detection and staging of precancerous lesions.

AI in the detection of gastric precancerous lesions and HP infection: Regarding CAG, in two studies, AI models were compared to endoscopists. Zhang et al[41] used the CNN model to detect CAG in 1699 patients. It outperformed three expert endoscopists with a sensitivity, specificity, and accuracy of 95%, 94%, and 94% respectively. Guimaraes et al[42] reported a 93% accuracy with WLE images.

Concerning GIM, Yan et al [43] developed a CNN-CAD model with ME-NBI. It reached an accuracy of 89% compared to 84% accuracy for expert endoscopists.

Concerning HP infection, Zheng et al[44] developed a CADe system to detect HP infection status based on endoscopic images without the need for biopsies. The CNN systems reached an accuracy of 92%. Nakashima et al [45] used a DL model with WLE and blue light imaging (BLI). The DL model had an area under the curve (AUC) of 0.96 with BLI, and 0.66 with WLE.

AI in the detection of EGC: Li et al [46] developed a CNN model on images of benign lesions and EGC. The AI model has a diagnostic accuracy of 91% compared to an accuracy of 87% when used by experts and 70%-74% for non-expert endoscopists. Horiuchi et al[47] used a CADe system to detect EGC using NBI videos and compared to 11 expert endoscopists in NBI. Only two endoscopists were outperformed by the CADe systems.

AI in the prediction of invasion depth of EGC: Nagao et al [48] developed a CNN-CAD system by using images of GC that underwent endoscopic resection or radical surgery to evaluate the accuracy of AI to determine invasion depth. They found that the CADe system can predict the invasion depth with a sensitivity of 75%-84%, specificity of 80%-99%, and accuracy of 94% during WLE and NBI images, respectively. Yoon et al [49] analyzed images of GC (T1a and T1b) to predict invasion depth with AUC of 0.85. This accuracy was significantly lower in undifferentiated lesions.

SMALL BOWEL

Inflammatory bowel disease

Recently, the therapeutic goals for patients with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) have shifted toward mucosal healing, defined by endoscopic evaluation. However, histologic evaluation is essential to predict the risk of relapse and colon

This GI field has emerged as a new area for AI, utilizing data from endoscopic images, video capsule endoscopy images, histology, magnetic resonance imaging images, laboratory studies, and genetics. Numerous studies with metaanalyses using ML and DL systems have aimed to detect Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis with high sensitivity and accuracy[49]. Additionally, AI studies utilizing ML and DL CNN systems have achieved a high level of accuracy in predicting disease severity for IBD[50,51].

Villous atrophy

Celiac disease is the primary cause of villous atrophy and remains undiagnosed in 50% of cases. A study conducted by Gadermayr et al [52] achieved a high accuracy of 94%, but that requires water immersion. Also, studies with video capsule endoscopy showed an accuracy > 90% [52-54]. These studies were conducted under special conditions with high probability of suspicion. It is mandatory to make the diagnosis in routine endoscopy. A recent retrospective study done by Scheppach et al [55] compared AI algorithms to performance of fellows and experts on routine endoscopy. The results showed that AI significantly improved the performance of all endoscopists with stable performance.

PANCREAS

Endoscopic ultrasound (EUS) is a reliable tool for the detection and staging of pancreatic lesions, particularly pancreatic cancer (PC). EUS-FNB is a well-established diagnostic tool for PC, demonstrating a specificity and sensitivity greater than 90%. However, the EUS technique is operator-dependent, exhibiting inter-observer variability, making it an ideal platform for AI applications.

Al in EUS for detection of PC

Three retrospective studies were conducted using DL algorithms, demonstrating high sensitivity, specificity, and accuracy in diagnosing PC[56-58]. Additionally, Goyal et al [59] conducted a systematic review of 11 studies on the role of AIassisted EUS models in diagnosing PC, revealing that AI algorithms had high potential for detecting PC.

Al in EUS differentiation PC from benign lesions

Chronic pancreatitis: Chronic pancreatitis still mimics PC in radiologic features and is also considered a risk factor for the development of PC. Five studies were conducted with DL algorithms, reporting high accuracy, sensitivity, and specificity [60-64]. However, these studies were heterogeneous with a small patient population. Hence, two recent prospective multicenter studies using DL models were published, validating the aforementioned findings[65,66]. Therefore, AIassisted EUS can be a validated tool in clinical practice to differentiate PC from chronic pancreatitis with accepted results.

Autoimmune pancreatitis: Marya et al [67] conducted a unique study using a DL model to differentiate between PC and autoimmune pancreatitis. The high sensitivity and specificity encourage the use of AI to assist EUS endoscopists in this field.

LIMITATIONS

Input data

DL tasks rely on databases used to train AI algorithms, which must be manually annotated and propagated through frames using dedicated software. The development of DL may be affected by selection biases, which include the chosen disease, its prevalence, the endoscopic center's characteristics, the patient population, and the number of patients enrolled. Spectrum biases in DL performance can arise from variations in patient population, the number and skills of endoscopists, and the technical characteristics used, such as WLE, advanced imaging, and optical magnification. Consequently, a database from a single institution, lacking diversity and failing to capture all possible variations, can impact the quality of input data, as well as the reproducibility and generalizability of the results. To mitigate these biases, it is essential to establish a quality-monitored central data collection server that aggregates data from all institutions.

Algorithm

Studies utilize different AI-assisted models that require images prepared in specific ways. These algorithms may not consistently achieve a high degree of accuracy. Therefore, it is essential to establish a universal protocol for input data to enhance the efficacy and accuracy of AI-assisted models.

Validation

AI findings must undergo clinical validation before being introduced into clinical practice. AI has a valuable advantage when the reference standard is based on histologic verification. However, if not, the reference standard relies on expert endoscopist raters, introducing potential bias. Therefore, AI systems should be validated through randomized trials comparing the standard and new endoscopic modalities. Additionally, these algorithms must be tested on large and cross-institutional datasets. Long-term data on the accuracy of AI-assisted models is lacking. Consequently, there are no results regarding the impact of AI on reducing the incidence and mortality of GI cancer. Clinical efficacy evaluation must adhere to established guidelines. The two recommended guidelines are the PIVI statement as a guide for new imaging technology and the ESGE guidelines. For example, in cases requiring targeted biopsies, PIVI recommends a per-patient sensitivity of 90% or greater and a specificity of 80% or greater to allow a reduction in biopsies. Therefore, studies must meet these parameters to be approved for clinical practice. Additionally, according to ESGE, the results of AI studies must be comparable to those of experts.

Output

There are "black boxes" in the logic of DL algorithm decision-making processes that are not understood or controlled by humans[68]. Consequently, AI can make mistakes, and humans cannot explain or justify the computer's decisions. For instance, physicians have concerns regarding the number of false-positive signals generated by AI. This may cause distraction, prolong procedure time, and frustrate the endoscopist, making some users hesitant to use it. Therefore, humans must make the final decision and should not become entirely dependent on AI technology for both diagnostic and therapeutic endoscopies; otherwise, they risk losing their cognitive abilities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, because the GI field relies on imaging, AI-assisted algorithms continue to explore new GI organs and diseases. The growth and applications of AI increase exponentially with the development of computer science and may reach no limit. However, we must be careful about how we use it and preserve our independence in the final decision. Additionally, to achieve better results in AI studies in the future, collaboration between academic and private gastroenterologists and the industry must be closer, aiming to improve the quality, utility, ease of use, and accuracy of AI models. We hope that AI-assisted diagnostic techniques will be widely used in GI diseases because AI is an unavoidable tool in GI endoscopy.

FOOTNOTES

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MINIREVIEWS

Expanding role and scope of artificial intelligence in the field of gastrointestinal pathology

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Abstract

Digital pathology (DP) and its subsidiaries including artificial intelligence (AI) are rapidly making inroads into the area of diagnostic anatomic pathology (AP) including gastrointestinal (GI) pathology. It is poised to revolutionize the field of diagnostic AP. Historically, AP has been slow to adopt digital technology, but this is changing rapidly, with many centers worldwide transitioning to DP. Coupled with advanced techniques of AI such as deep learning and machine learning, DP is likely to transform histopathology from a subjective field to an objective, efficient, and transparent discipline. AI is increasingly integrated into GI pathology, offering numerous advancements and improvements in overall diagnostic accuracy, efficiency, and patient care. Specifically, AI in GI pathology enhances diagnostic accuracy, streamlines workflows, provides predictive insights, integrates multimodal data, supports research, and aids in education and training, ultimately improving patient care and outcomes. This review summarized the latest developments in the role and scope of AI in AP with a focus on GI pathology. The main aim was to provide updates and create awareness among the pathology community.

Key Words: Gastrointestinal pathology; Digital pathology; Artificial intelligence; Machine learning; Deep learning; Precision diagnostics

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Core Tip: Anatomic pathology remains largely subjective compared to other diagnostic laboratory fields. However, the digitization of tissue sections and the development of artificial intelligence-based technologies are rapidly advancing imagebased diagnostics in anatomic pathology including gastrointestinal pathology. These technologies allow pathologists to make diagnoses more quickly and accurately, particularly for time-consuming and repetitive tasks, leading to higher volumes and faster turnaround times. Increasing awareness of the potential uses and benefits of these emerging technologies is essential for the pathology community.

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INTRODUCTION

Anatomic pathology (AP), particularly histopathology, represents the ground truth of medicine, providing the final and definitive test on which crucial treatment decisions are based, especially for cancer (Figure 1). Despite its critical role, AP has remained an analog enterprise, using processes developed in the early 20th century. Tissue preparation and diagnosis are still largely manual and subjective [1,2]. Diagnoses are based on the visualization and assessment of tissue sections on glass slides under a light microscope, making the process highly dependent on the pathologist's interpretation.

The diagnostic process is a complex mental exercise requiring multitasking and the coordination of observation, interpretation, and integration of information. This process yields continuous variables that pathologists use to drive classification systems, which clinicians use to make major therapeutic decisions (Figure 1). While cost-effective, this process is prone to significant inter- and intra-pathologist variation and diagnostic errors and is often time-consuming and tedious. The integration of multiple ancillary diagnostic tests, such as immunohistochemistry and molecular assays, adds to the complexity and demands on pathologists. Moreover, the shortage of pathologists globally exacerbates these challenges, highlighting the need for precision diagnostics, particularly in cancer treatment [3-5].

Traditionally, AP has been slow to embrace digital technology, but this is steadily changing. Many pathology laboratories worldwide have partially or completely transitioned to digital pathology (DP) workflows [6-10]. Advanced artificial intelligence (AI) techniques, such as machine learning (ML) and deep learning (DL), are set to transform AP into a more objective, efficient, and transparent discipline [11,12]. However, many pathologists, particularly in developing countries, have limited knowledge of AI and its vast potential [13,14].

This review aimed to provide a simplified overview of the latest developments in the role and scope of AI in pathology, with a specific focus on gastrointestinal (GI) pathology. It explored how AI can be used to diagnose and predict diseases, highlighting its benefits for routine histopathology practice. The goal was to update pathologists and other healthcare providers about these emerging diagnostic technologies and raise awareness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A comprehensive search was conducted across multiple databases, including PubMed, Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science, covering publications from 2010 to 2024. Keywords included "Artificial Intelligence," "Machine Learning," "Deep Learning," "Gastrointestinal Pathology," "Diagnosis," and "Histopathology." All types of studies in the English language were selected based on relevance, focusing on AI applications in GI pathology. The full texts of these articles were carefully read to extract the relevant points for writing this review article.

DEFINITION OF AI AND ITS APPLICATIONS

AI is a field of computer science that enables computers to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as learning, pattern recognition, planning, problem-solving, and reasoning [15-17]. AI relies heavily on data for its operations, and the digitization of glass slides in DP workflows provides vast amounts of pixel data for AI applications. AI can be considered a part of data science [18-21].

Initially, AI comprised simple "if-then" algorithms but has since advanced to include complex algorithms that perform tasks akin to the human brain. The advent of DL has expanded the capabilities of AI, allowing systems to analyze data and images using multiple layers and learn from big data. ML and DL are subsets of AI (Figure 2), with DL being a more advanced form capable of solving complex problems using neural networks (Figure 3)[22-24].

AI represents a significant turning point for human society, comparable to the industrial revolution. It is a general purpose technology applicable in various fields, much like electricity. The role of AI in healthcare is growing rapidly, particularly in biomedical research and clinical practice. Modern techniques now generate vast amounts of data, which AI can analyze for patterns, enhancing diagnostics and treatment decisions[25-29]. AI can detect subtle pathological

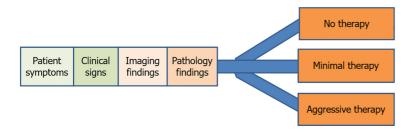


Figure 1 Pathological diagnosis is the final and definitive test that informs all subsequent therapy decisions by clinicians, particularly in oncology.

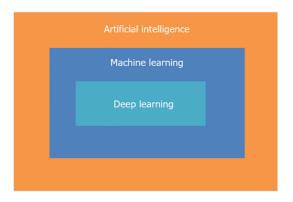


Figure 2 Relationship of artificial intelligence and its more advanced forms, machine learning and deep learning.

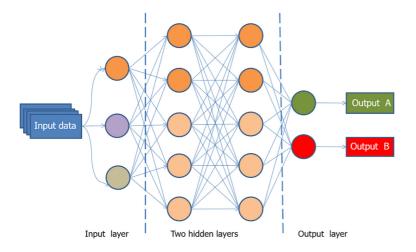


Figure 3 A simplified version of artificial neural network utilized in artificial intelligence algorithms.

alterations, predict therapy responses, and improve workflow efficiency in pathology[30].

In the diagnostics arena, radiologists have been early adopters of AI for image processing and interpretation[31,32]. Pathologists, facing greater visual data complexity in microscopic images, have been slower to adopt AI. However, the shift towards DP and whole slide imaging (WSI) is laying the groundwork for computational pathology technologies. With the recent advancements in AI for computer vision, it is expected that AI will soon support pathologists in various DP tasks. Concurrently, significant progress in DL has created a synergy with AI, enabling image-based diagnostics within the DP context. Efforts are underway to develop AI tools that save pathologists time and reduce errors[33]. Integrating AI systems into AP practices will require fully digital imaging platforms, updating outdated information technology infrastructures, modifying laboratory and pathologist workflows, establishing appropriate reimbursement models, and ensuring pathologists' active participation for buy-in and oversight. New regulations, designed to address the unique aspects and limitations of AI, are being developed to ensure its safe and effective use [34]. The recent Food and Drug Administration approval of WSI systems opens significant opportunities for AI-assisted pathological diagnosis, promising faster, more accurate, and cost-effective diagnostics[35-40].

ROLE OF AI IN ROUTINE AP DIAGNOSTIC WORKFLOW

AI is increasingly being integrated into AP to enhance diagnostic efficiency and accuracy, reduce turnaround times, and improve patient care [41,42]. All algorithms can analyze DP images with high speed and accuracy, assisting pathologists in identifying and quantifying specific features such as cell structures, mitoses, tissue patterns, and abnormalities. This reduces subjectivity, minimizes diagnostic errors, and ensures consistent results [43-47].

AI-driven workflow management tools can streamline daily tasks, prioritize cases based on urgency, and help pathologists allocate their time effectively. AI can also integrate patient data, provide decision support tools, and assist in quality control and compliance with regulatory standards. AI tools can develop predictive models for disease outcomes and support research by analyzing vast datasets [48,49]. Although technical implementation has become less challenging, much work is needed to integrate AI into routine AP workflows. AI can also enhance the understanding of disease biology by analyzing DP images to identify patterns and features not visible to the human eye. This can aid in discovering new biomarkers and treatments, benefiting both diagnostics and research[50,51].

ROLE OF AI IN GI PATHOLOGY

AI technology is poised to revolutionize GI pathology, offering numerous current and potential applications (Figure 4). By processing digitized images of tissue samples, AI tools enhance the precise and effective identification of various GI disease processes, including inflammatory and neoplastic conditions such as colitis, Crohn's disease, and colorectal cancer (CRC). The integration of AI in GI pathology significantly improves the precision, speed, and quality of diagnostic and therapeutic decision-making processes, ultimately benefiting patient care. Additionally, AI can standardize quality control in GI pathology, ensuring accurate and consistent results across samples [52-55].

AI has been extensively studied for endoscopic diagnosis of GI tract disorders, demonstrating significant promise. It is expected that AI will primarily assist endoscopists with tasks such as detection, characterization, and segmentation. AI has the potential to enhance colonoscopy-based colorectal screening and monitoring by reducing unnecessary expenses and improving quality. Real-time computer-assisted polyp identification can enhance screening and monitoring quality, as measured by adenoma detection rates. Optical biopsies using computer-assisted diagnosis can identify low-risk polyps, supporting resect-and-discard or diagnose-and-leave strategies, thereby reducing unnecessary costs. Recent metaanalyses indicated that AI tools significantly increased colorectal neoplasia detection, regardless of initial adenoma features [56-58]. Furthermore, AI is useful in identifying upper GI pathological processes, including both neoplastic and non-neoplastic lesions[59,60].

In the GI tract, precancerous lesions and invasive tumors are routinely biopsied or excised for histopathological workup. Early and accurate diagnosis is a primary responsibility of pathologists, and AI can assist in achieving this objective. Numerous reports have documented AI-assisted diagnosis of both neoplastic and non-neoplastic GI diseases. For instance, Korbar et al[61] trained a model to distinguish between five prevalent types of colorectal polyps with an overall accuracy of 93% using a dataset of over 400 WSIs. Wei et al [62] demonstrated that neural networks trained to identify colorectal polyps on WSIs from one institution performed similarly to local pathologists when applied to WSIs from other institutions. Efforts have also been made to automate the diagnosis of preneoplastic and neoplastic lesions, such as Barrett's esophagus or gastric adenomas/adenocarcinomas[60].

AI models also show promise in predicting therapy response or prognosis from WSI analysis. Among all cancer types, GI and liver tumors have notably driven computational oncology forward. AI can extract complex information from digital images of GI and hepatic malignancies, providing clinical, biological, and molecular insights that are not accessible to the naked eye. By identifying the most predictive tissue areas, AI reduces the cognitive burden on pathologists, enhancing their efficacy in histopathological characterization and risk assessments of GI preneoplastic and neoplastic lesions. In biliary tract cancer, DL can identify tissue features predictive of clinical outcomes. DP images and tissue microarrays from CRC have shown the efficacy of DL in prognostic prediction across all tumor stages. The histomorphology of gastric cancer (GC) is more complex and variable than CRC, leading to fewer investigations using DL for GC. Most of this research has focused on tumor detection rather than prognostication [63-66].

Routine processing of surgical and biopsy specimens from various GI tract tumors involves investigating molecular biomarkers that predict responses to targeted therapy. Specific genetic events in GI and hepatobiliary cancers are linked to morphological features identified in hematoxylin and eosin sections. AI-based algorithms on WSIs have been successfully used as surrogate markers for these alterations[66-69]. For example, CRC serves as a model disease due to the abundance of pathology samples. Identifying microsatellite instability (MSI) is crucial because immune-modulating treatments significantly affect MSI tumors. MSI identification has major implications for patients and their families, necessitating further investigation to identify Lynch syndrome. Although immunohistochemistry techniques are typically used to identify MSI, not all patients are routinely screened. A study by Echle et al [70] examined 8836 CRC cases across all stages, developing an AI model that could identify MSI tumors from hematoxylin and eosin sections, maintaining performance even in biopsy samples with limited tissue and varying preprocessing methods. Other efforts have created models that accurately predict gene alterations from WSIs of hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), GC, and other conditions.

AI-based pathology can predict gene expression and RNA sequencing data, holding great promise for clinical application. Developing DL models for prognostication that integrate clinical, biological, and genetic data is a promising approach. For example, Chaudhary et al [71] used RNA sequencing, microRNA sequencing, and methylation data to create a DL model predicting survival in HCC patients, demonstrating its efficacy across different HCC patient cohorts.

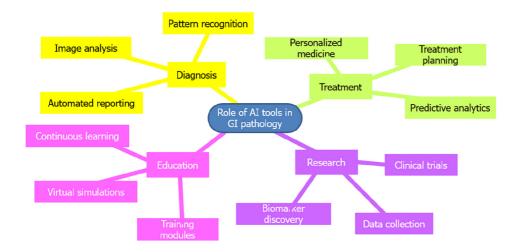


Figure 4 Four main roles of artificial intelligence-based tools in gastrointestinal pathology. Al: Artificial intelligence; Gl: Gastrointestinal.

AI ALGORITHMS IN GI PATHOLOGY

AI algorithms, particularly those based on ML and DL, have shown substantial potential in analyzing complex pathological data and are central to the advancements in GI pathology (Table 1). ML algorithms such as support vector machines, random forests, and k-nearest neighbors have been employed to classify and predict various GI conditions. These include supervised, unsupervised, and reinforcement learning algorithms (Figure 5). Supervised learning algorithms, such as support vector machines and random forests, are widely used for classification tasks. These algorithms require extensive feature engineering and domain expertise to identify relevant features from pathology images and clinical data. They are relatively simpler to implement and interpret compared to DL algorithms. They are also effective for structured data analysis and smaller datasets and feature faster training times and lower computational requirements. The need for manual feature extraction limits their use, and ML algorithms may not perform as well as DL in recognizing complex patterns in unstructured data like histopathological images [72-75].

DL models, particularly convolutional neural networks, have revolutionized image analysis in GI pathology [76,77]. Convolutional neural networks can automatically learn hierarchical features from raw images, making them highly effective for tasks such as tumor detection and classification. They possess superior performance in image recognition tasks and are able to handle large and complex datasets. Automated feature extraction reduces the need for domainspecific knowledge. However, it requires substantial computational resources and large annotated datasets. It is difficult to interpret and explain the decision-making process (black-box nature). Recurrent neural networks, including their variants like long short-term memory networks, are used for sequential data analysis. They are particularly useful in analyzing time-series data from endoscopic videos to detect abnormalities [78-84]. While ML algorithms are generally more interpretable, DL algorithms often provide higher accuracy due to their ability to learn complex patterns from large datasets. However, DL models require substantial computational resources and large labeled datasets, which can be a limitation[73,75,79,85].

DATA SOURCES IN GI PATHOLOGY

The performance of AI algorithms heavily depends on the quality and diversity of data sources. Common data sources in GI pathology include: (1) Histopathological images in the form of WSIs and tissue microarrays as the primary data sources; (2) Clinical data, such as electronic health records, patient demographics, clinical history, and endoscopy images; and (3) Publicly available datasets such as The Cancer Genome Atlas and Gastrointestinal Image Data Collection. Each of these sources has merits and demerits. Integration of clinical data, including patient demographics, medical history, and laboratory results, enhances the contextual understanding of GI pathology and improves the predictive power of AI models. The availability of large, well-annotated datasets is a significant challenge. Variability in image quality and staining techniques and differences in pathological practices across institutions can affect the generalizability of AI models. Additionally, integrating clinical data requires sophisticated data management systems to handle patient privacy and data security concerns.

PERFORMANCE METRICS OF AI ALGORITHMS

Sensitivity measures the ability of an AI algorithm to correctly identify positive cases (e.g., detecting cancerous lesions). Specificity measures the ability of an AI algorithm to correctly identify negative cases (e.g., ruling out benign conditions). Achieving high sensitivity and specificity is challenging due to the inherent variability in pathological samples. DL

Table	1 Main artificial intelligence	based algorithms for use in t	he gastrointestinal pathology field
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Al algorithms	Role in gastrointestinal pathology	Key uses	Examples
Machine learning	Assisting in diagnosis and classification of gastrointestinal diseases	Improved diagnostic accuracy, personalized treatment plans	Predictive models for colorectal cancer risk, classification of polyps in colonoscopy images
Deep learning	Analyzing endoscopic and histopath- ologic images	Enhanced image recognition, reduced human error	Convolutional neural networks for detecting and classifying lesions in endoscopic images
Natural language processing	Extracting relevant information from medical records and literature	Efficient data mining, real-time clinical decision support	Automated extraction of patient data from electronic health records for research and clinical use
Computer vision	Real-time analysis of endoscopic videos	Immediate feedback during procedures, increased detection rates of abnormalities	Detection of bleeding, polyps, and other abnormalities during live endoscopy procedures
Reinforcement learning	Optimizing treatment plans and clinical pathways	Adaptive learning from real-world outcomes, improved clinical decision-making	Personalized treatment strategies for inflammatory bowel disease based on patient response
Predictive analytics	Forecasting disease progression and patient outcomes	Proactive patient management, early intervention	Predicting flare-ups in Crohn's disease, forecasting outcomes after gastrointestinal surgeries
Robotics integration	Enhancing precision in minimally invasive surgeries	Increased surgical precision, reduced recovery time	AI-assisted robotic surgery for gastrointestinal procedures, such as robotic-assisted colectomy
Genomic data analysis	Identifying genetic markers associated with gastrointestinal diseases	Personalized medicine, targeted therapies	Analyzing genetic data to find markers for conditions like Lynch syndrome and hereditary pancreatitis

AI: Artificial intelligence.

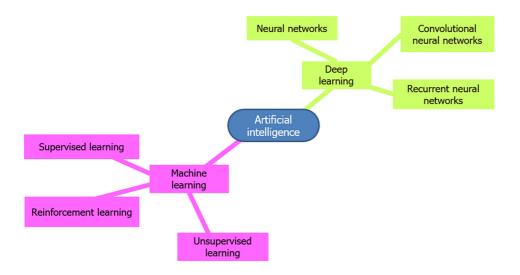


Figure 5 Main artificial intelligence-based algorithms for use in gastrointestinal pathology.

models often outperform traditional ML models in sensitivity and specificity due to their ability to learn intricate features from large datasets. However, there is a trade-off; models with high sensitivity might produce more false positives, reducing specificity. Balancing these metrics is essential to avoid misdiagnoses and unnecessary treatments[74,76,81,82].

CHALLENGES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

AI is still in its early stages, and many pathology laboratories worldwide have yet to transition to a digital workflow to fully benefit from AI technologies. There are numerous obstacles to the widespread implementation of AI solutions in routine clinical practice, even in developed countries. Bringing an AI solution for pathology to market poses significant technological, business, and regulatory challenges. Although some clinical applications exist, the overall introduction of AI into medical practice has been slow and not without ethical concerns[86-90].

Despite significant research developments in AI-based techniques in recent years, only a few AI solutions have become commercial products for routine use. Consequently, much of the potential of AI remains untapped. Research models need further development, improvement, and integration into the information technology infrastructure of clinical laboratories before they can be used in routine pathology workflows. Additionally, commercial success requires a profitable business model in most countries, and pathologists need to be reimbursed for using the product. AI solutions are also classified as medical devices and thus require regulatory approval before they can be sold as products[91-94].

CONCLUSION

The role and scope of AI are expanding in GI pathology, with the potential to improve diagnostic accuracy, efficiency, and patient care. Increasing awareness among the pathology community about these emerging technologies is essential to realize their full potential and revolutionize diagnostics, prognostics, and theranostics in GI pathology.

FOOTNOTES

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