

AI is Transforming Decision-Making in Healthcare

Michael Ghilissen

Department of Public Health Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, University of Liège

Michael.ghilissen@uliege.be

We examine the transformative role of (agentic) AI in healthcare decision-making, emphasizing how these systems evolve from passive data reporting to proactive automation. Through case studies such as supply chain operations management (SCOM), MedTAKMI-CDI, and Therabot, we demonstrate how autonomous agents can identify complex patterns beyond basic searches, address operational bottlenecks, improve data accuracy, and lessen manual tasks—all while maintaining humans in the loop.

Effective implementation relies on leadership approaches that focus on data preparedness, strong governance, and fostering a culture of trust. I also propose a five-stage maturity framework to help organizations manage the technical and cultural changes required to expand AI. Ultimately, the text depicts AI agents as strategic allies that enhance human judgment to create more resilient and efficient enterprise operations.

What is Decision Science?

Decision Intelligence (DI) involves transforming data into improved actions across various scales by integrating artificial intelligence, behavioral science, and traditional analytics. For the APN, DI is more than just a technical process; it serves as a mental toolkit for managing clinical uncertainty and organizational complexity.

Effective decision-making fundamentally relies on three interconnected mental functions: analyzing (breaking down data), synthesizing (combining parts to create a whole or envisioning solutions), and valuing (using criteria and judgment). Traditional analytics tend to focus on past and current data, but modern Decision Intelligence (DI) incorporates AI agents to transition from reactive reporting to proactive, goal-oriented actions. These systems can continuously monitor patient conditions, identify issues like SLA breaches in care delivery, and suggest interventions with minimal human oversight, while keeping the final decision in human hands.

Crucially, research indicates that AI cannot replace human judgment or experience. While AI may boost the performance of high performers by providing tailored strategies, it can reduce performance among those who lack the fundamental "business" or "clinical" judgment to interpret its advice. For APNs, this means that data fluency must be paired with intellectual humility and a willingness to treat every clinical decision as an iterative hypothesis rather than a final endpoint. In a medical setting, Decision Intelligence (DI) is the multidisciplinary field that

turns healthcare data into optimized clinical and operational actions by blending artificial intelligence (AI), behavioral science, and traditional analytics.

Practical Tools for Medical Environments

Implementing DI in clinical and public health contexts necessitates a systematic approach to minimize "manual churn" and enhance diagnostic precision. The following practical frameworks and tools are designed for the APN.

We need to rethink data science from a strictly technical role to a mental toolkit for managing uncertainty. The most valuable aspect of data fluency isn't just technical skills but mental agility—the capacity to think clearly when certainty fades.

For the APN leader, this involves shifting from merely consuming AI outputs to actively designing decisions, utilizing models to connect raw data and clinical action.

1. Bayesian Reasoning: The Science of Changing Your Mind

Bayesian reasoning is a mental approach that pairs intellectual humility with systematic learning. Rather than seeing diagnosis as simply yes/no or right/wrong, APNs should consider it a probabilistic belief that updates with new evidence like lab results, vitals, and patient responses. This perspective encourages treating each decision as an evolving hypothesis rather than a final conclusion.

- The Practical Tool: When reviewing new lab results or patient symptoms, ask yourself: "Considering our previous expectations and these new findings, how much more confident are we in this diagnosis?" View each diagnosis or care plan as an ongoing dialogue between past knowledge and current signals.
- Application: This method prevents overreacting to "noise" or outliers and promotes viewing patient care as an ongoing dialogue between past insights and current signals. When a patient's condition changes, instead of simply questioning whether the initial diagnosis was "right" or 'wrong,' consider asking: 'Based on our previous clinical expectations and this new information, how confident are we in our current direction?' This approach helps APNs avoid reacting excessively to "noise"—outliers—while staying attentive to true signals of change.

2. Trade-Off Framing: Designing Around Constraints

Medical DI incorporates Choice Architecture by offering options to healthcare providers that encourage informed decision-making while preserving clinical independence. It explicitly employs Trade-Off Framing to shift away from "magical thinking"—the misconception that speed, cost, and precision can all be optimized at once—and instead promotes honest prioritization of patient care.

Healthcare often succumbs to "silver bullet" fallacies. APNs need to understand that each decision involves an opportunity cost. Mature decision-making involves abandoning the "silver

bullet" illusion—the idea that speed, precision, and cost savings can all be achieved at once without trade-offs.

- The Practical Tool: Utilize Decision Matrices to clearly display trade-offs, encouraging a shift from "false optimization" to honest prioritization in discussions.
- Application: When weighing long-term public health actions against urgent crisis responses, consider: "What am I explicitly not doing, and is that sacrifice acceptable?" Use data not to justify a perfect decision, but to identify constraints. When assigning nursing resources, an APN should clearly state: "To prioritize emergency care, we will accept slower processing of elective discharge forms." Such transparency helps align the team and prevents paralysis caused by striving for perfection.

3. The Human as the "Sense maker"

A clear medical DI definition also indicates a shift from reactive reporting to more autonomous, agent-based systems. Proactive Monitoring: Unlike traditional medical analytics, which depend on humans to pose questions and seek answers, AI agents within a DI framework independently monitor patient health or hospital service-level agreements (SLAs), identify issues like delayed medication, and suggest actions. Human-in-the-Loop: In critical medical settings, DI is structured so that humans remain involved—providing clinical oversight to maintain safety and ethical standards—while AI handles routine data processing. AI is a tool, not a replacement for judgment. She famously remarks that although a calculator is better at division, it doesn't understand the reason behind dividing.

- The Practical Tool: The "Default Decision." Before analyzing data, decide on your initial action.
- Application: An APN should consider, "Based on my clinical expertise, the default is to discharge this patient today." Then, use AI or data agents to check if there's enough evidence to change that default. This approach avoids the common mistake of overly chasing data without actually improving the decision.

4. Signaling Awareness in Public Health Leadership: The Narrative Power of Clinical Actions

In public health, actions often convey values more strongly than metrics do. While data typically records *what* has been done, leaders need to think about what those actions imply. Each clinical or operational choice constructs a "perception architecture" that influences the expectations of staff, patients, and the community.

- The Practical Tool: Signaling Theory. Before making changes, conduct a "signal check" by asking yourself: "What story does this decision tell about our priorities?"
- Application: Before implementing a new policy, such as a hiring freeze or changing vaccination strategies, APNs should evaluate the perception architecture. Consider: *"What message does this decision send to staff and the community about our priorities?"* When an APN leader terminates a failing pilot, it's not only about cost savings; it reflects a culture that values honesty over the sunk-cost fallacy. Conversely, overlooking ongoing data discrepancies indicates a tolerance for poor data quality or a lack of accountability.

5. Clinical Decision Intelligence (CDI) & AI Agents

In medicine, data is frequently time-sensitive, inconsistent, and "messy". A clear medical definition of DI includes Clinical Decision Intelligence (CDI), which combines clinical expertise with machine learning to identify practical patterns from intricate health records.

- **Flexible Abstraction:** Unlike traditional databases that need strict formatting, CDI systems like MedTAKMI-CDI utilize a adaptable "metashema" to access patient data more easily. This enables clinicians to either "zoom out" for population trends or "zoom in" on a specific patient's care timeline.
- **Pattern Detection:** CDI determines which interventions result in improved outcomes for particular demographics or cancer types, revealing insights that might otherwise stay hidden in isolated notes.

In complex environments like cancer care, specialized systems like MedTAKMI-CDI use "metashemas" to navigate messy, time-sensitive records efficiently.

- **The Tool:** Leverage Chatbot, Action, and Data Agents.
- **Application:** An Action Agent continuously monitors all patient orders around the clock, identifies any milestones that violate service level agreements—such as delayed medication delivery—and sends alerts to the SME (APN) every few hours. This allows for proactive intervention.

6. Addressing the "DEEP" Framework of Medical Constraints in Public Health

In the fields of medicine and public health, DI is more accurately defined using the "DEEP" framework, which tackles four key decision-making challenges within particular constraints.

- **Decision Challenges:** Facing uncertainty when making choices, handling ethical public health issues, managing emergencies and crises, and setting priorities for resource distribution.
- **Constraints:** Medical DI must function within a health organization's values, information, time, and resources.

Health leaders encounter four key constraints: Values, Information, Time, and Resources.

- **The Tool:** The DEEP Framework for constraints.
 - Decision-making under uncertainty.
 - Ethical public health decision-making.
 - Emergency/Crisis decision-making.
 - Priority-setting/Resource allocation.

By leveraging these tools, APNs can move beyond mere crisis management to engage in strategic decision-making, partnering with AI to enhance their human skills and create more resilient health systems.

Summary for APN Leadership

By integrating these models, the APN shifts from simply approving decisions to actively designing them. This method democratizes access to advanced reasoning, allowing clinical leaders to view each patient interaction as an opportunity for ongoing hypothesis testing rather than a straightforward pass/fail test. The focus is not on always being correct but on being intentional and mentally flexible enough to remain "right enough, long enough" to enhance patient results.