

The Use of Ambient AI in GP Consultations

Dr Joe Gallagher is a practising GP, a member of our GP Advisory Panel and a Director on Medisec's Board of Directors. Dr Gallagher discusses below the use of Ambient AI in day-to-day GP consultations.

Ambient AI refers to systems (often a microphone or device such as a webcam in the consultation room) that listen to the conversation between a doctor and their patient and automatically generate documentation from it. In practice, an ambient AI “digital scribe” will unobtrusively record the consultation audio, transcribe the conversation by using connections between the words and concepts on which it was trained, to create a note for use in the patient’s health record. The GP does not dictate the note; the AI scribe produces a summary of the visit for the patient’s health record based on an interpretation of the conversation. Crucially, this happens in real-time in the background. This has been seen to allow the doctor to focus on the patient rather than the computer and general practice has been one of the early adopters of this technology.

Important Considerations Before Implementation

While the benefits are promising, it’s vital to consider a few key issues before rolling out ambient AI in your practice:

Data Privacy and Security:

- Any system that records patient encounters must handle data with utmost care. Ensure the ambient AI vendor complies with GDPR and health data protection standards. Typically, the audio is processed in the cloud, so you should verify where data is stored and be satisfied that it is encrypted and kept confidential. You may need to update your practice’s privacy policy to explain that consultations may be recorded and transcribed by an AI tool. The ICGP have a very useful guide, published in February 2025, on factors to consider in General Practice when using AI, available [here](#).
- The notes generated should be retained by the system for the minimum time necessary and many delete the notes from the ambient AI system once they have been copied to the patient record. It is also important to review the terms and conditions of the user agreement to determine whether collected data will be used for secondary purposes by the vendor or a third party. GPs should consider whether any secondary use of data specified in the user agreement is appropriate and acceptable before purchasing the product.

Patient Consent and Communication:

- Patient consent is required before using an ambient AI scribe in a consultation. Patients should be informed about the presence of the device/AI, what it will do (record and summarise the visit), and how their data will be used.
- My experience in practice is that patients are generally very accepting when asked. Nevertheless, you should obtain verbal consent at the visit. This transparency helps maintain trust. It can be as simple as, “With your permission, I have a system that will listen and help write the notes so I can focus more on you – is that okay?” Documenting the patient’s consent in their clinical notes is advised. A sign in the waiting room may also be useful and a sample one is provided below.

Accuracy and Oversight:

- Although AI has become impressively accurate, it is not infallible. Initial transcripts may contain errors (especially with strong accents or medical jargon) and generative summaries might occasionally misinterpret context leading to “hallucinations”. For example, in a discussion about urinary frequency, it may interpret this as being related to prostate issues, even if it is a female patient, or it may interpret a discussion about swollen legs as confirming a DVT. As the GP, it is vital to remember that you remain responsible for the accuracy of the clinical record; the notes produced by AI must be reviewed and validated by the GP. If something important was missed (the AI scribe can also leave out information it thinks is irrelevant) or the AI “hallucinated” a detail that wasn’t said, you need to catch and correct that to ensure that the patient’s records accurately reflect the conversation that took place. Human oversight remains essential for safety.
- As these tools gain popularity and their use increases, there is potential for GPs to become over-reliant on their use and pay less attention to reviewing the output generated by the AI scribe, resulting in errors that could affect patient safety. In a practice it is important that colleagues who spot errors in notes generated by an AI scribe highlight these to the original user to ensure that people remain aware of the limitations of the scribe. (If errors are noticed subsequently, and require clarification in the records, this should be done by way of a retrospective note in the medical records recording the error. The medical records themselves should not be retrospectively amended.)
- Particularly for GP trainees, the process of writing clinical documentation is important in developing a clinical plan and learning the essentials of good note taking. It is important to consider at what stage an AI scribe should be used by trainees and what impact it might have on developing clinical note taking and clinical formulation skills.

Having clear practice policies in place and training in that regard is essential for all staff members.

Step-by-Step: Implementing Ambient AI in Your Practice

1. Address Governance, Privacy and Consent:

- Before turning on any AI in real consultations, you should ensure that robust data protection and consent protocols are in place within your practice.
- Update your practice's privacy notice to include the use of AI for notetaking during consultations.
- Develop a simple script to obtain patient consent at the start of each consultation.
- Verify that the vendor's data processing agreement meets GDPR requirements (you may need to sign a Data Processing Agreement). Although some systems offer translation, if it's into a language you don't speak, you need to consider how certain you can be that the translation is accurate.

2. Pilot the System in Real Workflows:

- Implement the ambient AI on a trial basis. For a single GP, you might start using it for a subset of patient visits (for example, one afternoon a week) to get a feel for it.
- In a group practice, identify one or two enthusiastic doctors to serve as pilot users initially. Conduct a few test runs (perhaps even with staff acting as patients to simulate scenarios) before live patient use. During the pilot, closely monitor how the AI performs: How accurate are the transcripts and summaries? How much editing is required? How do patients react? Many systems allow some customisation – use the pilot to tweak templates (e.g. how the assessment/plan is formatted) or to add medical acronyms the AI should recognise.
- At the end of each pilot day, review the experience: Did it actually save you time or make things easier? Identify any issues such as poor microphone leading to poor notes. For some consultations you may find the AI scribe does not save time e.g. urgent care consultations where a single issue is being raised and you may decide to use this for longer consultations only. It is advisable to consider choosing one system for the practice to ensure you can monitor any developments regularly.

3. Integrate into Workflow:

- A successful rollout means everyone involved understands how to use the tool. Ensure that all GPs, practice nurses, or assistants are aware of it so if patients ask, they can describe what is being used.
- Integrate the AI into your routine: for example, decide if the GP will review the AI's draft notes with the patient still present (to verify details), or will the GP edit notes between appointments if needed.
- Prepare a plan for patients who decline consent – in such cases, the GP should revert to traditional notetaking for that consultation.
- Finally, make sure the integration is solid: test that you can easily copy notes into the patient's record and review them and that there are no formatting issues that arise when copying. If you use templates (like SOAP notes), check that the AI output matches those formats or adjust accordingly.

4. Roll Out Fully and Monitor Ongoing:

- After a successful pilot and training, extend the ambient AI to make available to all doctors in the practice who wish to use it. It might be wise to do a phased rollout – e.g. two more GPs start this week, then the rest next month – so that early adopters can mentor others.
- As you go live practice-wide, continue to monitor usage and benefits. Keep an eye on updates: ambient AI tech is evolving fast, and updates might improve accuracy or add features like creating task lists from the consultation.
- Finally, reassess the cost vs benefit regularly – are you seeing reduced burden and efficiency gains that justify the expense?
- Key Benefits of Ambient AI for GP Teams and Patients: -
 - Reduced Administrative Burden: Ambient AI scribes cut down the time GPs spend typing or writing notes. For example, clinicians using an ambient AI system reported a significant reduction in documentation time.
 - Improved Documentation Accuracy: AI-generated notes can be thorough and consistent. A recent pilot study found that notes produced by an ambient AI were comparable in accuracy and completeness to doctors' own clinical notes. The technology transcribes the encounter verbatim and formats it into a structured note. While starting from a detailed transcript can improve completeness, one of the most important factors is that the GP must review the draft note and make alterations before creating the final note, which is saved in the patient record.
 - Enhanced Patient Engagement: With manual note-taking reduced, GPs can give patients their full attention, particularly if the patient raises a number of issues in a consultation. Many doctors report that using an ambient AI scribe lets them

have more natural conversations with their patients. Patients notice the difference; in one study, patients felt their doctors were more personable and focused during visits where an AI scribe was used.

Conclusion

Ambient AI has the potential to transform the GP consultation by making record keeping more comprehensive and efficient, allowing doctors to focus more on patients. Early examples have shown that, when implemented thoughtfully, these tools can reduce workload, improve documentation quality, and make consultations more patient-centric. However, ambient AI also has potential to cause harm, and success depends on careful implementation, i.e., respecting patient privacy, integrating with workflows, securing consent, and maintaining human oversight. As with all AI this area is changing rapidly, and it is important to continue to monitor updates on the technology and emerging issues. By starting small, learning and adapting, a practice can harness this technology safely and effectively.

We look forward to further guidance in this area from key stakeholders, and we understand that the Medical Council will soon publish a position paper on AI in Irish Medicine, which we await with keen interest.

Sample Notice

(*NB: The below should be tailored to the specifics of your practice's AI platform*)

Dear Patients,

We're using Ambient AI to help improve your care. As part of our commitment to providing you with the best possible care, we are now using ambient AI technology during some consultations.

What is Ambient AI?

Ambient AI is a secure system that listens in the background of your consultation and helps the doctor by automatically creating a draft medical note. This allows the doctor to focus more on you during your visit – rather than typing or writing medical notes.

How It Works:

- A small microphone or device may be used in the consultation room
- The system transcribes the conversation between you and your doctor, and prepares a summary note for your medical record
- Your doctor reviews and approves this note before it is saved to your medical records

- No audio recordings are stored (**NB: Consult the AI Platform in use to ensure this is correct**)

Your Privacy Matters

- Your information is secure and confidential
- The system is fully compliant with GDPR and Irish data protection laws
- You will always be asked for your consent before ambient AI is used in your consultation
- If you prefer not to use it, just let us know – it's completely optional

Why Are We Using This?

- To reduce time spent on paperwork
- To improve the accuracy of your medical notes
- To allow your doctor to give you more focused attention

If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to a member of staff or your GP. We're happy to explain more.

Thank you for your support as we continue to improve our service.

Your GP Team

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