



# COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN THE AGE OF AI

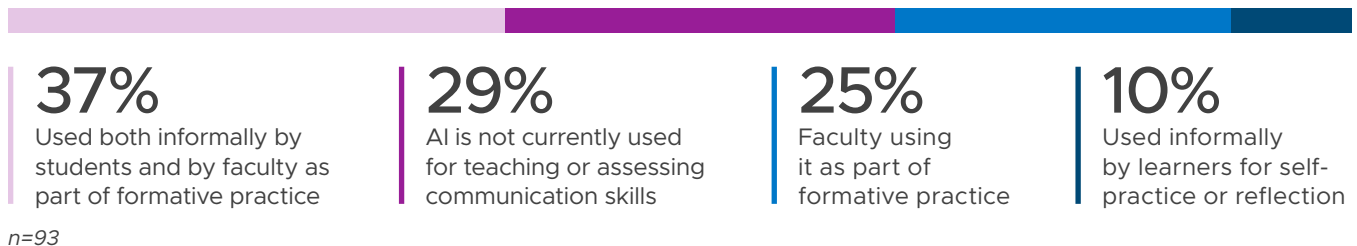


AI is influencing nearly every corner of medical education. But some skills can't be automated — they have to be developed. Dr. Stephanie Mann and Dr. Nancy Hayes recently discussed the impact of evolving AI technology on teaching and assessment of patient centered communication skills.

“Communication is really the core fundamental basis of that patient-physician relationship.”

— DR. NANCY HAYES,  
DIRECTOR OF CLINICAL FOUNDATIONS,  
FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

Before the webinar began, we asked attendees how they're currently using AI to teach or assess patient-centered communication skills.



## Communication is an essential clinical skill

The ability to respond to emotions, explain next steps and build trust with patients isn't innate. It's a learned competency that develops along a continuum and requires the same dedicated practice as any other clinical skill.

## Students need more practice than the curriculum allows

Before high-stakes clinical encounters, students need low-stakes opportunities to practice and receive immediate feedback. Without structured, repeated practice, communication skills don't develop.

## AI is prompting a new conversation about communication

AI in clinical settings raises a fundamental question: Should AI literacy be its own communication competency or woven into existing frameworks? There's no consensus yet — but it's a conversation worth having.

## Empathy remains at the heart of patient-centered care

Genuine curiosity, presence and the ability to recognize what a patient isn't saying are foundational to effective communication. These are skills that develop through practice, reflection and feedback.

# EMPATHY, AI, AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Psychologists identify three distinct types of empathy, each crucial for patient centered communication.



## Cognitive empathy

- Accurately grasping another person's thoughts, feelings and viewpoint.
- Especially valuable in high-pressure clinical encounters.



## Emotional empathy

- Having an emotional response that is attuned to the other person's state.
- The foundation of trust in the patient-physician relationship.

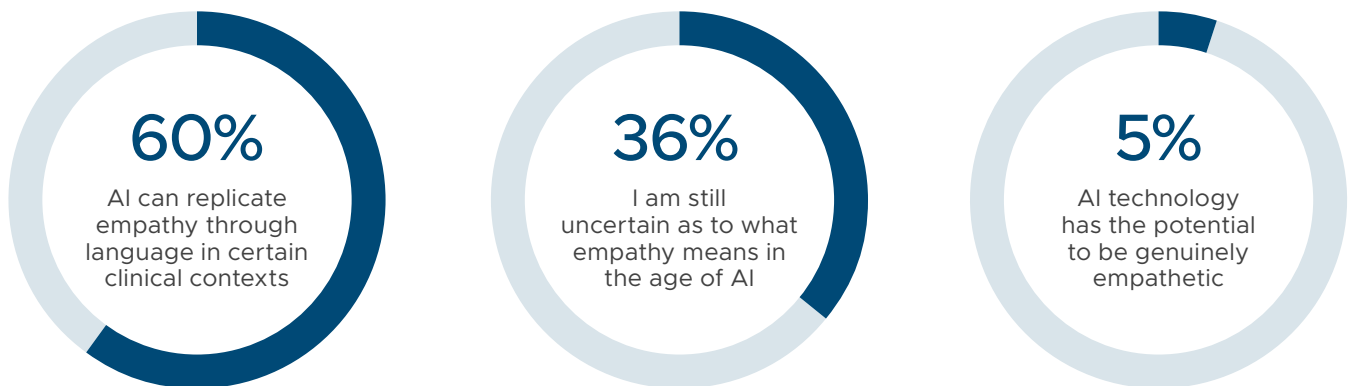


## Compassionate empathy

- Being motivated to help or support based on that understanding.
- The form of empathy most central to person-centered care.

## CAN AI TRULY BE EMPATHETIC?

The short answer is: it depends on which type you mean. LLMs can generate responses that are perceived as empathic, but there's a meaningful difference between language that sounds empathetic and the genuine understanding behind it. When we asked webinar attendees where they stood, the responses reflected that same distinction.



n=109

## FURTHER READING ON EMPATHY AND AI

- Ayers JW, Poliak A, Dredze M, et al. "[Comparing physician and artificial intelligence chatbot responses to patient questions posted to a public social media forum.](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamainternmed.2023.1838)" JAMA Intern Med. 2023;183(6):589–596. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamainternmed.2023.1838>
- Chen D, Chauhan K, Parsa R, et al. "[Patient perceptions of empathy in physician and artificial intelligence chatbot responses to patient questions about cancer.](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41746-025-01671-6)" npj Digit Med. 2025;8:275. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41746-025-01671-6>
- Kreitmair K. "[The fundamental fallacy of 'empathic AI'.](https://doi.org/10.1002/hast.5011)" Hastings Cent Rep. 2025;55(3):36–44. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hast.5011>
- Seitz L. "[Artificial empathy in healthcare chatbots: Does it feel authentic?](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbah.2024.100067)" Comput Human Behav Artif Hum. 2024;2:100067. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbah.2024.100067>

# PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

## How CLA helps students build patient-centered communication skills

The Communication Learning Assessment (CLA) is designed to address the exact challenges Dr. Mann and Dr. Hayes discussed. CLA provides case vignettes that support skills associated with fostering the relationship, providing information and responding to emotions.



### Practice before the pressure is real

CLA's video-based patient scenarios put students in realistic clinical situations before they're in front of real patients.

### Feedback that supports real improvement

Learners engage in guided self-reflection, compare their responses to exemplars, and then apply their learning in a second practice attempt.



### Designed to complement faculty teaching

Immediate learner feedback, paired with faculty guidance and support, facilitates the acquisition of patient-centered communication skills.

**VIRTUAL PRACTICE. REAL CONFIDENCE. SEE CLA IN ACTION.**

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