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African Journal of Medicine and Pharma Research

Journal homepage: https://www.africanjmpr.com/

Review Article

ChatGPT in medical education: Supporting pharmacology learning through conversational AI

Mohammed Sheeba Kauser[1], AL Prasanna Reddy Syamala*[1], T Ashok[1], D Govinda Raju[1]

[1]Dept. of Pharmacy, Sree Venkateshwara Pharmacy College, Nellore, Andhra Pradesh, India

Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) has rapidly transformed various fields, and its application in medical education, particularly in pharmacology, is gaining increasing attention. ChatGPT, an advanced conversational AI model developed by OpenAI, has demonstrated its potential to support personalized and interactive learning experiences. This review explores how ChatGPT can enhance pharmacology education by offering students a dynamic, conversational platform for learning complex drug-related concepts. By simulating real-time dialogue, ChatGPT can provide explanations, answer questions, generate quizzes, and facilitate case-based learning, making it a valuable tool for self-directed study and reinforcement of lecture materials. Additionally, ChatGPT's ability to adapt to individual learning needs allows for personalized study plans and targeted knowledge reinforcement. Despite its potential, challenges related to data quality, model interpretability, and AI limitations must be addressed for ChatGPT to be fully integrated into pharmacology education. This review highlights current applications, potential benefits, limitations, and future directions for using ChatGPT in the context of pharmacology education in medical curricula.

Keywords: ChatGPT; Medical Education; Pharmacology; Artificial Intelligence; Conversational AI; Self-Directed Learning; AI in Education; Personalized Learning; Interactive Learning; Pharmacology Education

Received: 06-02-2025; **Accepted:** 05-04-2025; **Available Online**:05-06- 2025

1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) has introduced transformative tools across various fields, including medical education. Among the most promising AI innovations is ChatGPT, an advanced language model developed by OpenAI. Known for its ability to generate human-like text based on user inputs, ChatGPT has rapidly gained attention as a valuable resource for self-directed learning, tutoring, and knowledge retrieval. In medical education, where the volume and complexity of information can overwhelm students, AI tools like ChatGPT present an opportunity to enhance learning outcomes by offering personalized, accessible, and interactive learning experiences.[1]

Pharmacology, the study of drugs and their effects on the human body, is a cornerstone of medical education.[2] With its intricate concepts—spanning drug mechanisms, interactions, pharmacokinetics, and therapeutic applications—pharmacology presents significant challenges for students. Traditional learning methods, such as lectures and textbooks, often fail to provide the interactive, real-time feedback required to reinforce complex ideas. Here, AI-driven tools like ChatGPT offer promising solutions by simulating real-time, dynamic conversations that enable students to engage with the material in a more interactive and intuitive way.[3]

Incorporating ChatGPT into pharmacology learning can offer several advantages, such as providing instant explanations, guiding self-assessment through quizzes and multiple-choice questions, and offering personalized study plans tailored to the individual needs of students. Furthermore, ChatGPT can assist in bridging knowledge gaps, reinforcing lecture content, and helping students understand clinical case scenarios, all of which are essential in preparing future healthcare professionals for real-world challenges.

This review explores the potential of ChatGPT to support pharmacology learning in medical education. We will examine its applications, effectiveness, and limitations in

*Corresponding author: AL Prasanna Reddy Syamala
Email: Sheebaishaq.doc@gmail.com

DOI: http://doi.org/10.18231/j.ajmpr.2024.003

enhancing pharmacology education, alongside a discussion on how it fits into the broader landscape of AI-powered learning tools.[4] By delving into current trends and case studies, we aim to assess the utility of ChatGPT in fostering a deeper, more interactive, and accessible learning experience for students in the pharmacology domain.[5]

ChatGPT is a language model developed by OpenAI, a research organization founded in 2015 with the mission of ensuring that artificial general intelligence (AGI) benefits all of humanity. OpenAI aims to build safe AI systems and promote transparency and collaboration in AI research. Over the years, OpenAI has produced a series of groundbreaking AI models, with GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) being one of the most notable.

The GPT series is based on a transformer architecture introduced in a paper titled “Attention is All You Need” by Vaswani et al. (2017). This transformer model significantly improved the ability of AI systems to understand and generate human language. GPT-1, the first iteration, was released in 2018 and was a precursor to more sophisticated versions. GPT-1 was followed by GPT-2, released in 2019, which gained attention for its ability to generate coherent and contextually relevant text.[6,7] GPT-2, with 1.5 billion parameters, showed substantial improvements over its predecessor in generating text based on input prompts. However, concerns about its potential for misuse (e.g., creating deepfake text) led OpenAI to initially withhold the full release of the model.

In 2020, OpenAI introduced GPT-3, the most advanced version of the model at the time, with a staggering 175 billion parameters. GPT-3 demonstrated unprecedented capabilities in generating human-like text, translating languages, answering questions, summarizing content, and even engaging in creative tasks such as writing poetry and generating code.[8] Due to its remarkable performance, GPT-3 garnered widespread attention in both academic and industry circles, further propelling the development and deployment of AI in various sectors, including healthcare, customer service, and education.[9]

Building on the success of GPT-3, OpenAI launched ChatGPT in November 2022. ChatGPT is fine-tuned from the GPT-3.5 model using a technique known as Reinforcement Learning from Human Feedback (RLHF). This allows ChatGPT to engage in interactive, conversational dialogue with users. Unlike previous models, which were primarily designed to generate responses to static prompts, ChatGPT is specifically optimized for dialogue-based interactions.[10] This makes it highly suitable for applications in customer service, tutoring, content creation, and even medical education.[11]

One of the key features of ChatGPT is its ability to understand context, maintain conversational threads, and provide coherent, contextually appropriate responses.[12] It can answer questions, clarify concepts, offer explanations, and simulate a wide range of dialogues across various fields, including science, technology, literature, and medicine. ChatGPT's conversational nature allows users to interact with it in a more intuitive, natural way, which has significant implications for fields like medical education, where complex concepts can be explained interactively.[13]

Since its launch, ChatGPT has revolutionized the way people approach learning and problem-solving, making AI-powered assistance more accessible to students, educators, and professionals alike. As part of its continued development, OpenAI has refined ChatGPT's conversational abilities and incorporated user feedback to improve accuracy, relevance, and safety. This ongoing refinement helps ensure that the AI can support a broad spectrum of educational needs, including pharmacology, where understanding complex drug mechanisms and interactions is critical.[14,15]

As of 2023, OpenAI introduced GPT-4, which powers newer versions of ChatGPT, offering even more sophisticated capabilities, such as better reasoning, multimodal input processing (text, image, etc.), and improved handling of complex queries.

2. Advances in ChatGPT in Medical Education and Pharmacology

The integration of ChatGPT into medical education and pharmacology represents a significant leap forward in the way students and professionals engage with learning materials, collaborate, and reinforce complex concepts.[16] As AI systems like ChatGPT become more sophisticated, their applications in education.[17] particularly in medical disciplines such as pharmacology, have become increasingly valuable. Below are some of the key advances in ChatGPT’s role in these fields:

Tailored content delivery: ChatGPT can offer explanations that are adjusted for students at various knowledge levels, providing simplified explanations for beginners or more technical detail for advanced learners.

Active learning support: By answering questions, generating quizzes, and offering case scenarios, ChatGPT encourages students to actively engage with the material. This is particularly useful in pharmacology, where

2.1. Personalized learning and self-directed study

One of the most significant advances in the use of ChatGPT for medical education is its ability to provide personalized, real-time learning experiences. Traditional classroom-based pharmacology instruction often follows a "one-size-fits-all" model, which may not suit every student's individual learning style or pace. ChatGPT, on the other hand, can engage with students in a tailored manner, adapting responses to their current level of understanding and needs.

understanding concepts like drug mechanisms, interactions, and metabolism can be challenging.

ChatGPT enables self-directed learning, allowing students to study at their own pace, clarify doubts immediately, and reinforce their knowledge through interactive dialogue.

3. Facilitating Case-Based Learning

Case-based learning (CBL) is a well-established pedagogical approach in medical education that emphasizes applying knowledge to real-life scenarios. ChatGPT's ability to simulate interactive discussions makes it an ideal tool for fostering case-based learning in pharmacology.

Clinical case simulations: ChatGPT can present case studies involving patients with various diseases and conditions, asking students to consider pharmacological treatments and decision-making processes. This can include drug choices, dosages, and managing side effects, which are central topics in pharmacology education.

Dynamic feedback: Unlike static case studies in textbooks, ChatGPT provides dynamic, context-sensitive feedback based on student inputs. Students can explore different treatment pathways, analyze patient data, and receive feedback on their clinical reasoning in real-time.

This approach enables learners to apply pharmacological concepts in a practical, clinical context, enhancing their problem-solving and decision-making skills.

3.1. Exam preparation and interactive quizzes

In the demanding field of pharmacology, exam preparation can be daunting due to the vast amount of material that needs to be mastered. ChatGPT's ability to generate multiple-choice questions (MCQs), flashcards, and practice tests tailored to specific pharmacology topics has proven beneficial for medical students.

Dynamic question generation: ChatGPT can generate quizzes that test students' knowledge on specific pharmacological mechanisms, drug interactions, adverse effects, and more. The questions can vary in difficulty, providing continuous challenges to students as they progress.

Instant feedback: When students take quizzes or practice exams, ChatGPT provides immediate feedback on correct and incorrect answers, explaining why a particular answer is correct or why a chosen response may be incorrect. This feedback is vital for reinforcing learning and correcting misunderstandings.

This adaptive assessment tool promotes active recall, a critical technique in effective studying, and helps students identify areas where they need further review.

3.2. Enhanced pharmacology content delivery

Pharmacology is a subject dense with complex terminologies, drug classifications, and scientific principles. ChatGPT can enhance content delivery by presenting the material in a variety of formats that cater to different learning preferences.

Explanations and analogies: ChatGPT can break down difficult pharmacological concepts into simpler terms or offer analogies to help students understand complex ideas like pharmacokinetics, drug-receptor interactions, and biochemical pathways. These analogies can make abstract concepts more tangible.

Interactive diagrams and visuals: As multimodal models (like GPT-4) evolve, ChatGPT can integrate images, diagrams, and even videos, which will allow students to interact with pharmacological content visually. For example, ChatGPT can explain drug absorption processes with annotated diagrams or discuss enzyme mechanisms using interactive 3D models.

These advances facilitate multi-sensory learning, helping students absorb pharmacology concepts through multiple channels, which is particularly effective for challenging material.

3.3. Support for lifelong learning and continuing medical education (CME)

Medical education does not end with graduation. Pharmacology evolves continually, with new drug classes, therapeutic strategies, and treatment guidelines emerging regularly. ChatGPT is a useful tool for continuing medical education (CME), helping healthcare professionals stay updated on the latest developments in pharmacology.

Real-time updates: ChatGPT can provide real-time information on new pharmacological research, drug approvals, and emerging treatment protocols, ensuring that healthcare professionals remain well-informed.

Self-paced learning for professionals: Physicians and pharmacists can use ChatGPT to review new pharmacological information, refresh their understanding of pharmacokinetics, or delve into new drug classifications at their convenience.

This supports the idea of lifelong learning in the medical field, enabling practitioners to stay current without the need for formal courses or time-consuming research.

3.4. Bridging knowledge gaps and enhancing global access

ChatGPT's ability to provide instant, accessible, and accurate information can help address educational disparities, particularly in regions where access to high-quality pharmacology education and resources is limited.

Global access to pharmacology resources: With a few prompts, students worldwide can access a wealth of pharmacological knowledge, facilitating global learning and collaboration.

Language accessibility: ChatGPT can communicate in multiple languages, making pharmacology content accessible to non-English-speaking students and professionals, thereby supporting the international exchange of knowledge and promoting global health education.

4. Conclusion

The advances in ChatGPT's capabilities make it a powerful tool in medical education, particularly in pharmacology, where the need for interactive, personalized, and accessible learning is paramount. As technology continues to evolve, ChatGPT has the potential to become a staple in medical curricula worldwide, empowering students and healthcare professionals to deepen their understanding of pharmacology, improve clinical decision-making, and stay updated with the latest advancements in the field. However, to maximize its effectiveness, continued attention to the limitations of AI, such as biases and the need for accurate data, must be addressed.

5. Conflict of interest

None.

6. Source of Funding

None.

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Cite this article: Kauser MS, Reddy Syamala ALP, Ashok T, Raju DG. ChatGPT in medical education: Supporting pharmacology learning through conversational AI. *Afr J Med Pharma Res.* 202;2(2):9–12