

Less Typing, More Talking: UW Health Doctors Test AI That Listens In

A pilot program using ambient listening is freeing up time for patient care—while keeping providers in control.

BY SAM RIZZO *UW–Madison School of Journalism and Mass Communication journalist for JOURN 335*

MADISON, Wis. — At UW Health, technology is no longer just behind the scenes—it's in the room with you.

In [2025](#), UW Health is expanding a program using artificial intelligence to “listen in” during patient appointments. The ambient listening technology records and transcribes the visit, then drafts the clinical notes for a physician to edit and approve. That means less screen time, less typing—and, according to many, more human care.

“This tool allows our care team members to look away from the screen and not split focus between their notes and their patient,”
said Dr. Joel Gordon, Chief Medical Information Officer at UW Health

The system was first piloted in June 2024 by 20 self-selected providers. Now, UW Health expects to quadruple that number by summer, bringing ambient listening to over 400 providers in Wisconsin and northern Illinois.



A UW Health nurse checks in with a patient during a clinic visit — *Photo by UW Health*

From Burnout to Breakthrough

Dr. Brian Patterson, UW Health's Director of Clinical AI, said the rollout reflects a larger shift in how AI is being embedded into daily healthcare.

"We've used what we call discrete data—numbers in the electronic health record—to predict things about patients for a long time,"
said Patterson.

"We have models that predict if a patient has sepsis, if they're likely to get sicker while hospitalized, or if they might fall after being discharged from the emergency department."



Brian Patterson, MD, MPH –
Photo by UW Emergency
Department

Another major [innovation](#) at UW Health is AI-generated drafts of patient messages. When patients send questions through MyChart, AI offers a draft reply for doctors to edit and personalize.

"The AI doesn't hit send—the doctor does,"
said Patterson.

"It's a cultural shift. AI is there to support the provider, not replace them."

UW Health also has safeguards in place to ensure responsible use.

"Right now, we monitor how often a provider sends a draft message without editing,"
stated Patterson.

"If someone sends too many unchanged, we follow up. So far, that number is very low, which shows people are using it responsibly."

"AI is there to support the provider, not replace them."
— **Dr. Brian Patterson**

Radiology's Silent Assistant

While radiology uses AI behind the scenes, other tools like ambient listening are changing how patients experience care in the room. In the Department of [Radiology](#), AI is helping identify what even trained eyes might miss.

"AI is helping us catch things that even a trained eye might miss—like lung nodules that could be early signs of cancer,"

from Dr. Scott Reeder, Chair of Radiology at UW–Madison

Reeder said AI tools assist in image triage and analysis, flagging urgent conditions more quickly and reducing interpretation time. He believes radiology's future depends on adopting this technology.

"The writing's on the wall. It's not optional—it's necessary," said Reeder.



Scott B Reeder, MD, MPH –
Photo by UW Radiology
Department



Tim Szczykutowicz, PhD, demonstrates CT scanning at UW Health — Photo by UW Department of Radiology

A UW Health radiology demonstration showcases CT imaging technology, reflecting the department's commitment to integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into clinical practice.

The event also highlights efforts to educate students on how emerging technologies are reshaping medicine.

He said tools like these are no longer experimental; they're becoming essential to the workflow. This fusion of human expertise and machine learning enhances diagnostic accuracy and efficiency, embodying the future direction of radiological care.

And as more departments adopt similar tools, UW Health continues to serve as a model for innovation-driven patient care.

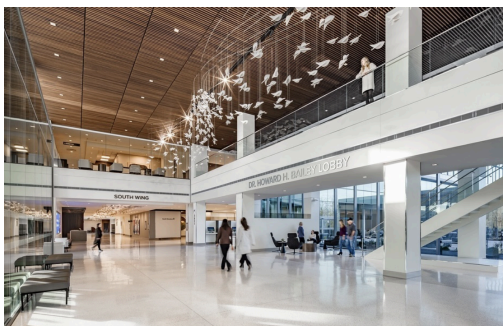
More Time, Better Care

For patients, the technology may be invisible—but the impact is already being felt. Ambient listening has helped doctors reconnect with their patients face-to-face.

“If I talk to a parent about their kid’s basketball game, I can actually be present—not typing,”
— said Dr. Jamham, a UW Health family medicine physician.

“The tool filters out the small talk, but lets me have it. It’s really a remarkable innovation.”

Patients are informed when ambient listening is used and can opt out. Providers remain responsible for reviewing and finalizing the notes created by the AI transcription.



UW Health’s Dr. Howard H. Bailey Lobby highlights the modern clinical setting where AI integration is quietly transforming care delivery. – Photo by UW Anesthesiology Department

What’s Next?

According to Dr. Patterson, AI’s broader goal is to improve both patient outcomes and provider well-being.

“Whether it’s predictive alerts, message drafting, or ambient transcription, we’re building AI into the workflow, not around it,”
he said.

“If you need a ton of training to use a tool meant to help you, it’s probably already failed. We want tools that are intuitive and make people’s jobs easier.”

Timeline: AI at UW Health

-  **2023:** Predictive models in emergency care
-  **2024:** Generative AI messaging pilots
-  **2025:** 400+ providers using ambient listening
-  **2026:** Expanding real-time AI decision support?

This is more than a tech upgrade; it’s a culture shift.

UW Health’s investment in AI isn’t about replacing doctors. It’s about giving them the time and tools to be better ones.