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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Ethics of Using Artificial Intelligence for Medical Residency Personal Statements

John-Stephane Kouam[1] · Thomas Kun Pak[1] · Cesar Eber Montelongo Hernandez[1]

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To the Editor:
Applying for medical residency is a high-stakes process. Residency personal statements are important factors for determining if an applicant receives an interview invite [1]. With advances in artificial intelligence (AI), such as large language models (LLMs), residency applicants can use AI to generate personal statements. Medical trainees have already been exploring how LLMs will impact their field [2]. A letter to the editor in *Academic Medicine* [3] has called upon relevant stakeholders to discuss AI in residency applications before establishing guidelines regarding AI usage in residency applications. Here we explore the ethics of AI usage in residency personal statements.

The Association of American Medical Colleges oversees the Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS). In the 2025 ERAS guide, they do not directly address the usage of AI in residency personal statement, but report plagiarism is not allowed [4]. This is complicated because there are different levels of AI involvement in the composition of residency personal statements, and higher levels of AI involvement can constitute plagiarism.

At its most basic level, AI software can check for grammatical and spelling errors, which is not expected to be acknowledged, as the work is primarily that of the human writer. At an intermediate level, AI software can modify the tone, clarity, and flow of a written piece while retaining the original ideas of the author. In these scenarios, the "voice" of the AI might begin to blend with that of the human writer. At an advanced level, LLMs such as ChatGPT can be used for idea generation, which can produce the majority or the entirety of a personal statement. Program directors find it difficult to determine if personal statements are AI-generated [5]. It is at this latter stage where AI's application in personal statement composition is most controversial, as it blurs the lines between original input and plagiarism (i.e., presenting work from another source as one's own).

As a positive, AI usage for personal statements can make the application process more equitable. Arguably, the purpose of a personal statement is to highlight the experiences and growth a person has undergone that has led them to apply for their respective specialty. This purpose brings into question to what extent mastery of narrative writing is essential. If the experiences and growth of an applicant are real, does an AI writing about them make them less valid?

The personal statement can unintentionally filter applicants through the prisms of language proficiency or financial privilege. For those with English as a Second Language or limited literary talent, crafting a compelling narrative could be challenging, even if they can otherwise appropriately communicate. In addition, advantaged applicants have for years been able to hire editors to draft professional-level personal statements. AI has the potential to assist similarly in the admission process. AI can offer research assistance, narrative restructuring, and valuable feedback, resources traditionally restricted to those with financial means. AI can bridge the fluency and financial gap with its ability to provide feedback and support, ensuring that nuance is preserved. This democratization empowers all applicants to tell their unique stories with clarity and confidence, a vital step toward a more equitable admissions landscape.

Negative considerations for widespread AI usage are the effects on authenticity in a personal statement and the subsequent evaluative usefulness of personal statements for residency programs. At the core, it is plagiarism to take content produced directly from LLMs, as one is representing others' work (i.e., LLMs) as original. In addition, LLMs are trained on existing content and can produce plagiarized writing. A personal statement generated by LLMs can be devoid of the applicant's intent or experiences. Furthermore, if AI usage for personal statements becomes conventional, personal statements may become homogenized and not useful

✉ Thomas Kun Pak
pakmdphd@gmail.com

[1] University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, Dallas, TX, USA

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in distinguishing residency applicants. Residency programs risk accepting residents with inflated communication skills, who may be ill-equipped to handle the rigors of daily note-writing and patient interaction.

How can training programs differentiate an AI-sculpted persona from the genuine voice of an applicant? This concern resonates deeply in psychiatry, a field where personal narratives hold immense weight. Psychiatry is a specialty rooted in understanding human behavior, emotions, and personal experiences. The personal statement is a means to assess these factors. Using AI-generated content feels inherently disingenuous, a manufactured representation replacing the integration of lived experiences that shape a physician's path toward their chosen specialty.

It is too early to determine if it is ethically appropriate to allow trainees to use LLMs in their personal statements. If trainees are allowed to use LLMs, the use of LLMs ought to be acknowledged. AI usage in personal statements is not a binary interaction but, rather, lies on a spectrum of utility and drawbacks. Given that AI use has the potential to be incorporated into much of modern technology, it may be unrealistic to forbid AI use. There is an opportunity for relevant parties such as ERAS and residency programs to establish a clear set of guidelines and restrictions regarding AI usage in personal statements. For example, AI may be used to generate templates or polish user content but not to generate final drafts. AI content must be authentic to the user's experiences, and guidelines for avoiding plagiarism should be followed. Likewise, residency programs should be transparent about how they determine if content is AI-generated.

The medical profession must tread cautiously by navigating a path that preserves the authenticity of personal narratives while fostering inclusivity and fairness. Ultimately, navigating this novel landscape requires a delicate balance, harnessing AI's power as an editorial assistant while preserving the human core of a process meant to showcase genuine potential.

Declarations The authors did not use ChatGPT or other large language models to generate this paper.

Disclosures On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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