

# The Era of Digital Orthopedics: A Bone or Bane?

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## Learning Point of the Article:

Digital orthopedics, a burgeoning field at the intersection of telemedicine, digital imaging, and artificial intelligence, aims to enhance the precision and efficiency of orthopedic care. Nonetheless, it confronts notable challenges, including the need to ensure equitable access to these technologies while upholding stringent data security and privacy standards.

## Introduction

Orthopedics, the medical specialty dedicated to diagnosing, treating, and preventing disorders of the musculoskeletal system, has long been a cornerstone of healthcare. With an aging population and an increasing emphasis on maintaining an active lifestyle, the demand for orthopedic care is on the rise. However, the field of orthopedics is rapidly evolving, and one of the most significant developments in recent years is the emergence of digital orthopedics [1, 2]. This transformation is reshaping the way orthopedic care is delivered, from diagnosis and treatment to patient outcomes and beyond. In this editorial, we explore the concept of digital orthopedics, its implications, and the potential benefits it offers to both patients and health-care professionals.

## The Rise of Digital Orthopedics

Digital orthopedics, also known as orthopedic informatics or orthopedic digital health, refers to the integration of digital technology into orthopedic care and practice [2]. It encompasses a wide range of tools and solutions, including telemedicine, digital imaging, wearable devices, mobile apps, artificial intelligence (AI), and data analytics. The goal is to enhance the efficiency, accuracy, and accessibility of orthopedic care, ultimately improving patient outcomes and reducing

healthcare costs. The strategies of digital orthopedics are as follows.

## Telemedicine in orthopedics

Telemedicine has played a pivotal role in the digital transformation of orthopedics. With the advent of high-speed internet and secure communication platforms, patients can now consult with orthopedic specialists from their homes. This not only eliminates the need for long, often inconvenient commutes but also ensures that patients receive timely and expert advice. Telemedicine is particularly valuable in cases of post-operative follow-up, routine consultations, and non-urgent orthopedic concerns. Patients can share their symptoms, medical history, and images with their orthopedic providers through video calls or secure messaging, enabling efficient remote monitoring and decision-making [3]. Furthermore, it bridges the gap between patients and specialists, making orthopedic expertise more accessible, especially in remote or underserved areas.

## Digital imaging and diagnostic tools

Digital imaging technologies, such as X-rays, magnetic resonance imaging, and computed tomography scans, have long been indispensable in orthopedics. These images are essential for diagnosing conditions such as fractures, osteoarthritis, and

## Author's Photo Gallery



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ligament injuries. The transition from traditional film-based radiography to digital imaging has brought numerous advantages, including quicker image acquisition, reduced radiation exposure, and enhanced image storage and sharing capabilities [4]. In addition to digital imaging, computer-aided diagnostic tools are becoming increasingly sophisticated. AI algorithms can assist orthopedic specialists in interpreting medical images and detecting abnormalities with remarkable accuracy. These tools help speed up diagnosis and enable early intervention, ultimately improving patient outcomes.

### **Wearable devices and mobile apps**

The integration of wearable devices and mobile apps in orthopedic care has empowered patients to actively participate in their treatment and rehabilitation [5]. Wearables such as fitness trackers and smartwatches can monitor physical activity, gait, and even sleep patterns, providing orthopedic professionals with valuable insights into a patient's lifestyle and overall health. Mobile apps, on the other hand, offer customized exercise regimens and educational resources for patients recovering from orthopedic surgeries or managing chronic conditions. These tools facilitate remote monitoring and adherence to prescribed rehabilitation programs, promoting faster recovery and better compliance.

### **AI and data analytics**

AI and data analytics are revolutionizing orthopedics by enabling predictive and personalized care. AI algorithms can analyze large datasets of patient information to identify trends and predict outcomes [6]. For example, they can help orthopedic surgeons predict the success of joint replacements or estimate the risk of complications in specific patient populations. Furthermore, data analytics can uncover insights that improve health-care delivery and resource allocation. By examining patient demographics, treatment outcomes, and cost-effectiveness, health-care organizations can make data-driven decisions to optimize orthopedic care delivery. With the help of AI, it is possible to create orthopaedic 3D imaging models, virtual orthopaedic journal clubs, symposiums, CMEs, and webinars for educating orthopods over the globe.

### **3D printing, telemedicine and beyond**

Three-dimensional printing has transformed orthopedic surgery, enhancing preoperative planning and educational methods [7]. It is particularly impactful in pediatric orthopedics for replicating complex deformities and enabling patient-specific surgical approaches [8, 9]. Virtual orthopedic journal clubs, popularized during the COVID-19 pandemic, have become key in developing critical appraisal skills of orthopedic literature [10]. These clubs have proven effective in enhancing the ability of residents and attendings to critically

evaluate scientific papers [11], with success dependent on engagement and paper selection [12]. The shift to telemedicine and virtual learning in orthopedic education, accelerated by the pandemic, has been met with mixed reactions from trainees [13]. Telemedicine has emerged as a feasible, cost-effective option for orthopedic consultations [14], while the transition to virtual teaching has had varied impacts on training programs, as evidenced by diverse resident experiences [15].

### **Benefits of Digital Orthopedics**

The integration of digital technology into orthopedics brings a multitude of benefits to patients, health-care providers, and the health-care system as a whole [16-20].

#### **Improved access to care**

Digital orthopedics significantly improves access to orthopedic care. Patients no longer need to wait for an in-person appointment, and those in remote or underserved areas can connect with specialists without traveling long distances. Telemedicine and remote monitoring options ensure that patients receive timely care and advice, ultimately leading to better outcomes.

#### **Enhanced diagnostic accuracy**

The use of digital imaging and AI-powered diagnostic tools increases diagnostic accuracy and reduces the likelihood of missed or incorrect diagnoses. These technologies help orthopedic specialists identify subtle abnormalities in medical images and provide precise recommendations for treatment.

#### **Personalised treatment plans**

With the assistance of AI and data analytics, orthopedic care can be tailored to individual patient needs. Treatment plans can be optimized based on patient demographics, risk factors, and predictive models, resulting in better outcomes and cost-effective care.

#### **Remote monitoring and rehabilitation**

Patients undergoing orthopedic surgeries or managing chronic conditions can benefit from remote monitoring and rehabilitation programs delivered through wearable devices and mobile apps. These tools enhance patient engagement and adherence to treatment regimens, leading to quicker recovery and improved quality of life.

#### **Health-care cost reduction**

Digital orthopedics can contribute to reducing health-care costs. Timely interventions, personalized treatment plans, and remote monitoring help prevent complications and unnecessary hospital readmissions. Furthermore, telemedicine can cut down on the overhead costs associated with in-person consultations and hospital stays.

### **Challenges and Considerations**



While digital orthopedics holds great promise, it is not without its challenges and considerations, which are as follows [18, 21-23].

### Technology access and equity

Not all patients have equal access to digital technology, which can exacerbate health disparities. Health-care organizations and policymakers must address these disparities to ensure that all patients have the opportunity to benefit from digital orthopedics.

### Data security and privacy

The collection and sharing of patient data, particularly in telemedicine and remote monitoring, raise concerns about data security and patient privacy. Health-care providers and technology companies must implement robust security measures to protect sensitive patient information.

### Training and education

Health-care professionals need the training to utilize digital tools in orthopedics effectively. The rapid evolution of technology means that continuous education and adaptation are essential to providing high-quality care.

### Regulatory frameworks

The regulatory landscape for telemedicine and digital health is still evolving. Health-care organizations and technology providers must navigate a complex web of regulations and standards to ensure compliance and patient safety.

## Conclusion

Digital orthopedics is at the forefront of a health-care revolution

**Declaration of patient consent:** The authors certify that they have obtained all appropriate patient consent forms. In the form, the patient has given the consent for his/ her images and other clinical information to be reported in the journal. The patient understands that his/ her names and initials will not be published and due efforts will be made to conceal their identity, but anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

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