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The vibe shift: how a decade of healthcare
communications prepared us for AI

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The vibe shift: how a decade of healthcare communications prepared us for AI

Every year, a phrase seems to capture something about the cultural moment. This time, it was 'vibe coding.' Its selection as word of the year by Collins Dictionary shows how quickly AI terminology has entered everyday language. The phrase itself might seem far removed from the scientific and highly regulated world of healthcare, but it reflects a broader truth: AI is not a specialist tool anymore. It is something people use casually, and it is shaping how we think, work and create.

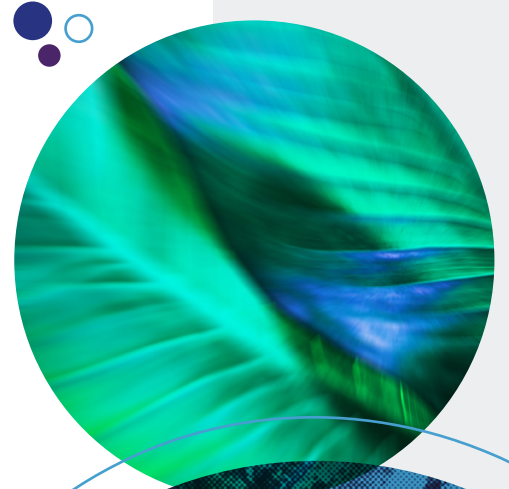
The healthcare communications industry is feeling this shift as well. AI is taking on tasks that would previously have been unrealistic or too time-consuming, and people across the ecosystem (including clients, healthcare professionals, patients and internal teams) are paying attention. However, our field works under a different set of expectations from the wider tech world. Accuracy, transparency and scientific integrity cannot take second place to novelty or speed. The challenge is finding ways to benefit from AI productivity and new applications, while keeping the same high standards and level of rigour that underpin credible healthcare communications.

At Helios, we have been actively investing in finding this balance, and our leadership team has participated in wider industry discussions about establishing a responsible use of AI. In a recent podcast, Simon Whiteley, our Chief Scientific Officer, reflected on how AI is reshaping healthcare communications, the guardrails needed for its credible application and the role that agencies play in setting practical standards. **His views** shape many of the themes explored in this paper, particularly the need for clear governance, scientific discipline and thoughtful adoption.

The relationships that Helios scientific experts build with our clients and external experts have always been central to our work; AI does not alter that, but it does give our teams new ways to work more efficiently and with deeper engagement. This belief has shaped a steady, evidence-driven approach at Helios. We have invested in building organisational readiness, understanding the AI landscape, and developing a way of working that emphasises human oversight, transparency and the freedom to use the best tools for the job. Our aim has been to understand when AI adds value and when restraint is necessary.

As AI becomes more embedded across healthcare, we see our role as one of providing expert guidance, clarity and discipline in how it is used in healthcare communications. This paper outlines how AI is influencing the field, what we have learned so far and how organisations can approach AI responsibly in the next phase of its development.

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A decade of difference – lessons from past waves of change

Helios was founded on the premise that strong healthcare communications rely on scientific rigour, evidence-based thinking and a respect for the complexity of scientific data. Our teams are built around these principles. They interpret evidence carefully and translate it into meaningful insight, and follow processes that are designed to protect quality, scientific integrity and accuracy.

As we mark our tenth anniversary – a decade of difference – we are reflecting on how the field has evolved: from early digital adoption to multichannel approaches and, later, omnichannel strategies. Each shift opened new possibilities for engagement. But anyone who worked through those phases will also remember the rapid adoption driven by hype and fear of missing out. Plenty of initiatives were launched without an ongoing commitment to apply new capabilities in service of scientific clarity and meaningful impact to healthcare professionals and their patients.

AI has become a major inflection point. Its value is clear, but so is the importance of focusing on outcomes rather than novelty. As such, AI does not represent a new identity for us; it needs to be used thoughtfully, with strong guardrails, and in ways that strengthen the quality of the scientific work that we have always prioritised. Our first decade gives us the foundation to do that well and shapes how we consider the place for AI in our future.



Using AI responsibly in healthcare communications

Our experience over the past 10 years has led us to define a set of principles that guide how we use AI, providing a framework for how we design our AI journey as an extension of our existing quality standards.



Science first

We start, always, with the scientific need and introduce AI only when it improves clarity, rigour or efficiency. New tools are evaluated on how well they support communication, not on their novelty.

People before platforms

AI should support expertise, not replace it. Medical writers, therapeutic leaders, editors, project leaders, and all members of our creative, digital and operational teams remain responsible for the quality of what we produce. Their judgement is at the core of what we do, and it shapes every AI-enabled process that we implement.

Transparent and accountable use

Trust is essential in healthcare communications. That means being clear about how, when and why AI tools are used. We do not rebrand tools or hide the role that AI plays in our workflows. Instead, we provide transparency around the platforms involved, the nature of the AI support, and the guardrails applied to protect data and scientific quality.

Platform-agnostic collaboration

The rate of change in AI is phenomenal, and we have all seen how quickly the 'best' solutions can change and be overtaken by others. Remaining adaptable and agile – working with the right solutions for each context rather than locking into a single platform – is essential to staying at the forefront of AI benefits and aligning with our clients' evolving ecosystems.

The human side of transformation

Principles and tools mean little unless our people can use them confidently. The success of any AI approach depends as much on capability and behaviour change as on the technology itself. Our work, therefore, focuses on building skills and shared practices, and on supporting clients to do the same. Our aim is to ensure that AI can be used in day-to-day work without overstating its value or compromising scientific standards.

With this in mind, we did not begin by rolling out tools. We began by understanding the landscape and when AI could make a practical difference. Internal and external AI experts helped us to map opportunities, risks and realistic entry points.

The first step was literacy. We developed our AI 101 Academy to provide every colleague with a baseline understanding of how current AI systems work, their limitations and their appropriate use in our field. This ensured that conversations about AI are grounded in a shared, realistic understanding.

In parallel, we put core governance in place: guidance on data use, clarity around acceptable applications, and expectations for oversight and quality. Establishing this early gave teams the confidence to experiment safely, without cutting corners or worrying about data safety.



Once these foundations were set, we moved into structured testing. An internal taskforce supports teams to explore AI in real project workflows. Early pilots focused on contained, lower-risk tasks such as summarisation, comparison and initial insight gathering. Each pilot had clear questions: Where does AI genuinely help? Where does it fall short? What checks are essential? The findings from these pilots guide how we scale approaches, always in partnership with clients. As the benefits became clearer, successful methods have been incorporated into everyday workflows. AI now supports some tasks routinely, but optionally, with outputs always reviewed by our own experts and continually refined as needs and tools evolve.

As our own teams incorporate new technologies, we recognise that our clients are going through similar journeys. Clients vary widely in how they are approaching AI; policies, approved platforms and comfort levels differ, and our work adapts accordingly. Sometimes we introduce our own tools and frameworks, and sometimes we operate entirely within a client's enterprise environment. We bring our experience with prompts, workflows and safeguards, and adapt these to fit our clients' needs, not the other way around.

Much like our internal journey, this often involves training and hands-on support. We want to help clients to build sustainable capability, rather than dependence, so that AI-enabled approaches become part of how their own teams work, not just something done 'by the agency'.



How AI has already changed the healthcare communications landscape



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Across the wider healthcare landscape, we have seen how AI has already begun to reshape how information is generated, interpreted and shared. Clinicians now rely on AI-enabled tools to support diagnostic review, prioritise alerts in electronic health records and monitor large datasets that would once have been difficult to interpret in real time. These systems do not replace clinical judgement, but they allow teams to act sooner and with greater situational awareness. As a result, the pace at which insight becomes available has accelerated, and this has raised expectations about how quickly new information should be understood and communicated.

At Helios, we are following a similar approach – by combining deep scientific and medical expertise with advanced AI, we help our clients to uncover insights faster, anticipate challenges earlier and make more confident decisions. We carefully select and develop AI solutions that genuinely add value, always with an 'expert in the loop' to ensure accuracy and relevance.

For example, evidence reviews that once required extensive manual screening now begin with AI supported literature triage and summarisation, giving scientific teams a clearer starting point and allowing more time to be spent on detailed interpretation. Thematic mapping, guideline tracking and structured comparisons are becoming more efficient, helping teams to spot emerging signals earlier and with greater consistency.

Congress activity has also evolved. Automated programme mapping and abstract grouping allow teams to prepare more quickly before an event, while AI-assisted transcription and note processing mean that insights can be turned into concise debriefs during or shortly after sessions, rather than days later. Advisory boards and workshops have seen similar changes: AI-generated summaries and draft outputs give writers a more organised foundation to build from, allowing their expertise to be directed toward strategic implications and nuances rather than administrative reconstruction of discussions.

Content development has shifted too. AI now supports early drafting for materials such as plain language summaries, helps to adapt core content across formats and enables more flexible training experiences; for example, recorded modules that can be updated or localised without needing to rebuild them from scratch. Instead of trying to replace the expertise of our team, all of these applications remove repetitive or process-heavy steps, so that scientific and creative effort can be directed to where it has the greatest impact.

Taken together, we see that these developments mean that stakeholders across healthcare increasingly expect communication that is not only accurate and compliant, but also more timely, tailored and responsive to new evidence as it emerges.



Using AI responsibly in healthcare communications

Everyone is at a slightly different stage when it comes to establishing their expectations and relationship with AI. Wherever your organisation is on its AI journey (curious, cautious, already experimenting or implementing), the next decade in healthcare communications will be defined not by who adopts AI first, but by who adopts AI well.

Our blueprint for the future maps out key stages of this journey to ensure a solid foundation for AI capabilities.

1. Begin with readiness, not rush

Before tools or pilots, start with an honest assessment of your organisation's AI maturity.

- Do your teams understand the strengths and limitations of AI?
- How might AI meaningfully support scientific clarity or operational efficiency?
- Are your teams aligned on why you want to use AI, not just how?

Understanding readiness creates the foundation for safe, strategic progress.

2. Focus on value-driven use cases

The most successful programmes begin small and purposeful with a clear outcome and measurement of success in mind.

Existing experts are best placed to judge the quality and success of new workflows. Identify areas where AI can strengthen, not replace, that expert work, such as evidence screening, congress intelligence or early content drafting. These are projects in which AI lightens the load, freeing teams to apply their deeper scientific judgement when it matters most.

3. Scale what works

Know what actually works by defining and measuring impact. That may be speed of delivery, depth of insight or improvements in scientific understanding. Having these outcomes in mind upfront ensures that success is measured where it matters. Then, embed proven workflows into day-to-day operations, while continually refining prompts, safeguards and feedback loops. Systems and capabilities can change quickly. Organisations must be in a position to benefit from this change but also have processes in place to monitor and safeguard against unexpected changes or failures.

4. Put governance at the heart of adoption

Innovation cannot come at the cost of scientific credibility. Establish clear guardrails around transparency, oversight and data handling, and protect scientific integrity and organisational trust.

When handled correctly, governance should not be limiting – it is what guides teams to effective and appropriate usage and enables responsible innovation at scale.

5. Build capability, not dependency

Sustainable AI adoption means building the skills and confidence to respond to an industry that is transformed by new capabilities. The 'best' tools for any job can and will change, so organisations must be ready to adapt, and carefully consider where to invest in AI and how to ensure that entire teams are onboard.

This includes:

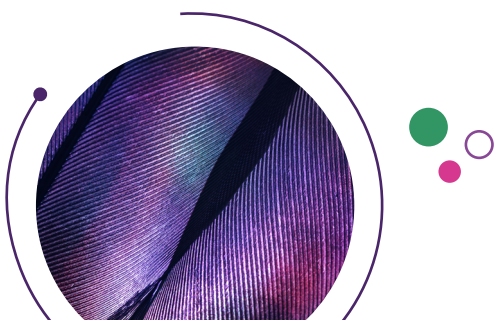
- Carefully considering whether to build, buy or partner
- Developing shared literacy and understanding, and not underestimating the need for behaviour-change programmes to support uptake and adoption
- Training teams to evaluate and challenge AI outputs
- Ensuring that human oversight remains central to every workflow

Although many organisations will be driving this process with objectives centred on using AI, success will come from an environment in which AI is incorporated as a natural extension of the team's efforts to enhance scientific excellence.

6. Choose partners who bring scientific and technological fluency

The landscape is evolving quickly. Organisations benefit most when they work with partners who combine deep subject-matter expertise with practical experience, and who can start to incorporate the benefits of AI without losing sight of the core scientific imperatives.

A good partner should help you to cut through hype, identify genuine opportunities and build methods that stand up to scientific scrutiny.



Looking to the future

As tools mature, we expect that AI will become less visible and more woven into existing workflows. Background processes such as monitoring, structuring information and flagging changes are likely to become increasingly automated.

In the near term, well-defined tasks such as routine monitoring, document adaptation and dashboard preparation offer clear opportunities. These steps follow predictable rules and carry low risk under strong oversight.

However, over the longer term, more connected systems offer dramatic change, linking activities such as congress tracking, publication monitoring and development, and content maintenance. As always, our approach here will remain cautious and evidence-led, but we are excited about the opportunities that the future holds.



Our approach at Helios has been steady and deliberate: rooted in scientific rigour, governance, and purposeful, value-based implementation of new tools

We are excited to build toward the next 10 years

AI is now part of the backdrop for healthcare communications. Expectations around speed and data use are changing, but the responsibilities of the field remain the same.

Our approach at Helios has been steady and deliberate: rooted in scientific rigour, governance and purposeful, value-based implementation of new tools. As the field continues to evolve, we will keep refining our methods and working with clients to apply AI where it makes a measurable difference. Over the last 10 years, we have focused on being a science-led, committed partner; over the next 10 years, we look forward to strengthening our offering further by adapting and evolving what we can make possible in healthcare communications.

If you are exploring how to use AI responsibly in your scientific and healthcare communications programmes, we would be delighted to discuss where meaningful value can be created today and how to prepare confidently for tomorrow.

Ready to talk?

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