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# Transforming medicine with Artificial Intelligence: A study of AI use cases in pharma

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# ABSTRACT:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming the pharmaceutical industry by enhancing the efficiency, accuracy, and speed of drug discovery, development, and delivery. Recent advances in machine learning, natural language processing, and data analytics have enabled pharmaceutical companies to analyze vast datasets, identify novel drug candidates, optimize clinical trials, and streamline manufacturing processes. This review paper provides an overview of current AI applications in the pharmaceutical industry, highlighting real-world case studies, discussing challenges such as data privacy and regulatory issues, and exploring future trends. This study explores real-world use cases of AI in the pharmaceutical domain, drawing on case studies from companies such as Atomwise, Merck, and Pfizer to illustrate AI's impact on reducing development time, improving accuracy, and responding to global health challenges like COVID-19. The aim is to offer students and early-career researchers a concise yet comprehensive understanding of how AI is reshaping pharmaceutical science.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, pharmaceutical industry, drug discovery, machine learning, clinical trials, data analytics, regulatory challenges, future trends in pharma.

# 1. Introduction

The pharmaceutical industry is undergoing a digital revolution, with Artificial Intelligence (AI) at the forefront of this transformation. Traditionally, drug discovery and development are time-consuming and costly processes, often taking over a decade and billions of dollars to bring a single drug to market<sup>1</sup>. The integration of AI technologies—such as machine learning, deep learning, and natural language processing—has introduced new opportunities to accelerate research, reduce costs, and improve success rates<sup>2</sup>. AI systems can analyze complex biological data, predict molecular interactions, and identify potential drug candidates much faster than conventional methods. For example, deep learning models have demonstrated the ability to predict protein structures and drug-target interactions with remarkable accuracy<sup>3</sup>.

Moreover, AI-driven platforms are now being used to design more efficient clinical trials, optimize patient recruitment, and monitor safety in real time<sup>4</sup>. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the value of AI in pharma, as companies like Moderna and Pfizer leveraged AI-driven analytics to accelerate vaccine development<sup>5</sup>. As digital transformation continues, AI is expected to become an integral part of pharmaceutical innovation, promising improved patient outcomes and more personalized therapies.

This review explores the current landscape of AI applications in the pharmaceutical industry, presents notable case studies, discusses ongoing challenges, and outlines future directions for research and practice.

#### 2.Artificial Intelligence in Drug Discovery and Development

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is fundamentally reshaping the landscape of drug discovery and development by enabling pharmaceutical companies to analyze vast and complex datasets with unprecedented speed and accuracy<sup>2</sup>. Traditionally, identifying and validating new drug candidates is a lengthy and costly process, often requiring years of research and significant financial investment<sup>1</sup>. AI-driven technologies now allow researchers to rapidly screen chemical libraries, predict molecular interactions, and optimize drug structures, thereby accelerating the early stages of drug discovery and reducing associated costs<sup>2</sup>.

One of the most significant contributions of AI is in **target identification**, where machine learning algorithms analyze genetic, proteomic, and clinical data to uncover potential therapeutic targets for various diseases<sup>2</sup>. This capability streamlines the design of new medications by focusing efforts on the most promising biological pathways. Additionally, AI-powered **virtual screening** enables the efficient evaluation of millions of compounds to identify those most likely to interact effectively with a specific target, saving both time and resources<sup>3</sup>.

AI also plays a crucial role in structure-activity relationship (SAR) modeling, helping researchers optimize drug candidates for potency, selectivity, and safety<sup>2</sup>. Advanced models, such as deep learning and reinforcement learning, are now used for **de novo drug design**, generating entirely new

molecules with desirable pharmacological properties<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, AI-driven approaches facilitate **drug repurposing** by analyzing large-scale biomedical data to identify existing drugs that may be effective for new therapeutic indications, thereby shortening development timelines and reducing costs<sup>2</sup>. The integration of AI into drug discovery has led to measurable improvements in efficiency. For example, deep learning models, such as those used in the AlphaFold system, have demonstrated the ability to predict protein structures and drug-target interactions with remarkable accuracy<sup>4</sup>. AI-discovered drug candidates have also demonstrated higher success rates in early-stage clinical trials, with Phase 1 success rates reaching 80–90%, compared to the historical industry average of 40–65%<sup>2</sup>. These advances are expected to increase the overall probability of a molecule successfully navigating all clinical phases, potentially doubling the industry average<sup>2</sup>.

Popular AI tools and platforms in drug discovery include DeepChem, RDKit, and AutoDock Vina, each offering specialized capabilities for molecular property prediction, virtual screening, and drug design<sup>2</sup>. As these technologies continue to evolve, the role of AI in pharmaceutical research is expected to expand further, driving innovation and improving patient outcomes<sup>2</sup>.

## **3.**Artificial Intelligence in Clinical Trials

Clinical trials are a critical phase in drug development, traditionally characterized by high costs, lengthy timelines, and complex data management. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is now revolutionizing this process by streamlining trial design, enhancing patient recruitment, automating data analysis, and improving safety monitoring<sup>6</sup>. One of the most impactful uses of AI in clinical trials is **patient recruitment**. AI algorithms can rapidly analyze electronic health records, genetic profiles, and demographic data to identify and match eligible patients with specific trial criteria, significantly reducing recruitment time and improving trial diversity<sup>7</sup>. Predictive modeling further refines this process, ensuring optimal patient selection based on disease subtype, medical history, and even geographic location<sup>7</sup>. AI also plays a key role in **protocol design and optimization**. By analyzing historical trial data and current scientific literature, AI systems can suggest protocol improvements, define endpoints, and recommend recruitment strategies, leading to more efficient and scientifically robust trials<sup>5</sup>. For example, AI-powered platforms can simulate trial scenarios to predict potential challenges and optimize study design before the trial begins<sup>5</sup>.

**Real-time safety monitoring** is another area where AI excels. Machine learning models continuously track patient data and adverse events, allowing for rapid identification of safety signals and enabling immediate interventions to protect participants<sup>5</sup>. This not only enhances patient safety but also supports regulatory compliance. The concept of **digital twins**—virtual replicas of patients—represents a groundbreaking application of AI in clinical trials. These digital models simulate patient responses to interventions, allowing researchers to predict outcomes and tailor therapies to individual needs<sup>5</sup>. Several companies are already demonstrating the real-world impact of AI in clinical trials. For instance, Insilico Medicine's INS018\_055, the first drug with both a novel AI-discovered target and AI-generated design, has reached phase 2 trials for idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis<sup>5</sup>. Tempus uses AI to streamline trial recruitment and management by analyzing extensive clinical and molecular data, while Recursion Pharmaceuticals employs AI and computer vision to accelerate drug candidate identification<sup>5</sup>.

By automating document review, optimizing protocol design, enhancing patient recruitment, and enabling real-time monitoring, AI is making clinical trials faster, more cost-effective, and more reliable<sup>5</sup>. As these technologies continue to evolve, their integration into clinical development is expected to further accelerate the delivery of safe and effective therapies to patients worldwide<sup>6</sup>.

#### 4.Artificial Intelligence in Manufacturing and Supply Chain

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is also transforming pharmaceutical manufacturing and supply chain management by enhancing operational efficiency, improving quality control, and enabling predictive maintenance<sup>8</sup>. The complexity of pharmaceutical manufacturing, which requires strict adherence to regulatory standards and quality assurance, benefits greatly from AI-driven automation and data analytics. In manufacturing, AI-powered computer vision systems are used for **defect detection** and quality inspection, identifying anomalies that may be missed by human operators<sup>9</sup>. These systems help ensure product consistency and reduce waste. Predictive maintenance algorithms analyze sensor data from manufacturing equipment to forecast failures before they occur, minimizing downtime and optimizing production schedules<sup>8</sup>.

AI also plays a crucial role in **demand forecasting** and **inventory management** within the pharmaceutical supply chain. By analyzing historical sales data, market trends, and external factors such as pandemics or regulatory changes, AI models can predict demand fluctuations with high accuracy, enabling companies to optimize stock levels and reduce shortages or overproduction<sup>10</sup>.Real-time logistics management is enhanced through AI-enabled **smart warehouses** and **automated routing**, which improve the speed and reliability of drug distribution<sup>8</sup>. These technologies are particularly valuable in managing cold chain logistics for temperature-sensitive products like vaccines. Leading pharmaceutical companies have reported significant benefits from AI adoption in manufacturing and supply chain operations. For example, Pfizer's AI-driven manufacturing processes increased vaccine production throughput by 20%, while Johnson & Johnson achieved a 50% reduction in unplanned downtime through predictive maintenance<sup>8</sup>.

As the pharmaceutical industry continues to embrace digital transformation, AI is expected to play an increasingly vital role in ensuring efficient, flexible, and resilient manufacturing and supply chains, ultimately improving patient access to medicines<sup>8</sup>.

## 5.Case Studies of AI in the Pharmaceutical Industry

#### a. Atomwise and AI-Driven Drug Discovery for COVID-19

The global outbreak of COVID-19 highlighted the urgent need for rapid therapeutic discovery and development. Traditional drug development pipelines, which typically span several years, proved insufficient in responding to the urgency of such a global health crisis. Atomwise, a pioneer in AI-powered drug discovery, showcased the immense potential of artificial intelligence to address this challenge. By utilizing its deep learning platform, AtomNet, the company significantly accelerated the process of identifying promising drug candidates targeting the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

#### 1. Approach and Methodology

At the heart of Atomwise's strategy was virtual high-throughput screening (vHTS), powered by the AtomNet platform. AtomNet employs deep convolutional neural networks to predict the binding affinity of small molecules to specific biological targets. For COVID-19, the system was used to screen millions of compounds in silico against critical viral proteins such as the main protease (Mpro) and RNA-dependent RNA polymerase (RdRp), as well as host proteins involved in viral entry and replication. Beyond its proprietary platform, Atomwise launched over 15 global collaborations with academic and research institutions to explore various aspects of the SARS-CoV-2 life cycle. Through its Artificial Intelligence Molecular Screen (AIMS) program, the company democratized access to its AI tools, allowing researchers worldwide to identify and prioritize novel chemical entities for experimental validation<sup>12</sup>.

#### 2. Key Results

1. High-Volume Screening: AtomNet screened over 10 million compounds per project, a task that would have taken years using traditional lab-based methods<sup>12</sup>.

2. Target Diversity: The platform identified structurally novel hits for more than 200 SARS-CoV-2-related targets, with each target yielding over seven unique, drug-like scaffolds. This significantly expanded the chemical space explored compared to conventional high-throughput screening<sup>17</sup>.

3. Biological Validation: Many top-ranked compounds were synthesized and tested in in vitro assays, with several demonstrating potent inhibitory activity against SARS-CoV-2 proteins. These outcomes validated the predictive power of AtomNet and provided strong candidates for further development and lead optimization<sup>15 16</sup>.

#### 3. Broader Impact

1. Time Efficiency: The AI-driven approach reduced the duration from target selection to hit identification from months or years to just days or weeks, enhancing responsiveness during pandemics<sup>15</sup>.

2. Global Collaboration: By offering its AI tools to academic institutions, Atomwise fostered a global collaborative ecosystem, promoting faster and more inclusive research advancements<sup>12 13 14</sup>.

3. Scalability for Future Preparedness: The platform's scalability positions Atomwise as a vital asset in pandemic preparedness, capable of rapidly addressing future outbreaks with AI-enabled drug discovery<sup>1217.</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

The Atomwise case illustrates how AI is no longer a futuristic concept but a transformative tool already reshaping drug discovery. Through powerful computational models, rapid virtual screening, and global scientific collaboration, AI is making pharmaceutical R\&D faster, more efficient, and more responsive to public health needs. As adoption continues to grow across the pharmaceutical industry, further advancements in drug development, personalization, and delivery are expected—heralding a new era of medicine driven by data and intelligence.



# b. Merck – Demand Forecasting & Supply Chain Optimization

Area: AI-enhanced forecasting

Background:

Merck & Co. faced challenges in aligning production with fluctuating global demand across its extensive operations, including four planning hubs, 80 distribution centers, 20 in-house and 148 external manufacturing sites, and over 10,300 product configurations <sup>18</sup>.

#### 1. Methods

1. Integration of Planning Systems

Merck integrated multiple ERP and inventory systems into a unified planning platform that provided real-time visibility over finished-goods inventories and enabled segmentation to recognize and respond to demand anomalies<sup>19</sup>.

2. Deployment of Predictive & Prescriptive AI

Partnering with AI vendor Aera Technology, Merck implemented predictive modeling to anticipate demand and began piloting prescriptive functionality enabling the system to recommend and automate replenishment actions <sup>20</sup>.

## 2. Results

1. Improved Forecast Accuracy : AI-based demand forecasting tools reduced forecasting errors by up to 40%, leading to significant decreases in inventory carrying costs and stockouts<sup>21</sup>.

2. Operational Efficiency Gains : Integration reduced under-utilized capacity and improved on-time delivery metrics through Lean and Six Sigma initiatives

3. Enhanced Decision Automation: Predictive models matured into prescriptive solutions that began executing optimal supply chain decisions automatically

#### 3. Discussion:

Merck's journey highlights that integrating internal systems and leveraging AI not only improves forecast accuracy, but also enables real-time, automated decision-making. The transition from descriptive to predictive and prescriptive analytics created measurable benefits: reduced waste, enhanced capacity use, and better response to demand variability. Critical success factors included clean, integrated data; change management; and stakeholder engagement across the organization <sup>19 20</sup>.

#### 4. Conclusion:

Merck's implementation of AI-enhanced forecasting and supply-chain optimization demonstrates a scalable model for pharmaceutical manufacturers. By integrating systems, applying predictive-prescriptive algorithms, and automating actions, Merck achieved up to a 40% improvement in forecast accuracy—resulting in cost savings, efficiency gains, and supply chain resilience.

# 6. Artificial Intelligence in Regulatory Affairs

The complex regulatory landscape in pharmaceuticals—covering submissions, compliance monitoring, and safety reporting—has traditionally relied on labor-intensive, manual processes. AI offers transformative solutions to optimize these critical workflows.

Generative AI tools now autonomously draft responses to Health Authority Queries (HAQs), forecast query likelihoods, and support submission strategies. Early pilots report reductions in query cycles by approximately 30% and up to 50% fewer follow-up requests<sup>22</sup>. Regulatory platforms can auto-generate submission documents and clinical study report sections in minutes, cutting drafting time in half<sup>23</sup>.

AI-powered pharmacovigilance systems analyze adverse event (AE) reports, case narratives, real-world data, and social media to detect safety signals much earlier. Pfizer has utilized AI since 2014 to automate AE report intake and processing—tasks that comprise around 50% of pharmacovigilance costs<sup>24</sup>. One tool, PVLens, automatically extracts structured safety data from FDA labels with an F1 score of 0.882, greatly improving accuracy over traditional methods<sup>25</sup>. In June 2025, the U.S. FDA deployed **Elsa**, a generative-AI assistant designed to expedite scientific review. Elsa shortens document review times from days to minutes by summarizing adverse events, packaging inserts, and clinical protocols—securely and without using regulated-industry data for model training<sup>26</sup>. By June 30, 2025, Elsa is scheduled for integration across all FDA review centers<sup>26</sup>.

Next-generation Regulatory Information Management Systems, such as Freyr's *freya fusion*, automate global regulatory intelligence, eCTD publishing, label compliance, metadata tagging, and RTQ forecasting. These systems deliver up to 60% faster document assembly, 70% less manual monitoring, and 50% fewer approval delays<sup>27</sup>.

Cloud-based AI platforms also analyze historical dossiers to forecast approval risk, detect submission inconsistencies, and streamline documentation. Cedience's models, for instance, process massive datasets from electronic submissions to predict outcomes, boosting both accuracy and decision-making efficiency<sup>28</sup>.

These innovations bring remarkable benefits, including faster document preparation, improved pharmacovigilance, and enhanced submission quality. However, full-scale adoption must address challenges such as data security, ensuring proprietary documents are not used to train third-party AI; transparency in model decision-making to meet regulatory scrutiny; and the development of unified legal-ethical frameworks for AI in global pharmaceutical governance<sup>29</sup>.

# 7. AI Integration Across the Pharmaceutical Development Lifecycle

Artificial intelligence is transforming the pharmaceutical development lifecycle by enhancing efficiency and precision at every stage. In early research and drug discovery, AI algorithms rapidly analyze vast and complex datasets—including genomics, proteomics, and scientific literature—to identify potential drug targets and predict drug-protein interactions, significantly reducing the time and cost required to find viable candidates. During preclinical and clinical development, AI supports modeling for safety and efficacy, optimizes patient recruitment and trial design, and streamlines data management and analysis, leading to improved trial outcomes and faster decision-making. In manufacturing, AI-driven process control and quality assurance ensure consistent product quality and operational efficiency. Post-market, AI systems continuously monitor real-world data to detect adverse events and support ongoing safety surveillance. This comprehensive integration of AI not only accelerates drug development but also enables the creation of more targeted, effective, and safer therapies for patients.





#### 8. Challenges and Ethical Issues in AI Adoption in Pharma

While Artificial Intelligence (AI) offers many benefits to the pharmaceutical industry, there are several challenges and ethical concerns that need to be addressed for its safe and effective use.

One major challenge is **data quality and availability**. AI systems require large amounts of high-quality data to learn and make accurate predictions. However, pharmaceutical data can be complex, incomplete, or inconsistent, which limits AI's effectiveness<sup>1 2</sup>. Additionally, much of the data from failed experiments or negative results is not published, creating gaps that make AI training harder<sup>2</sup>. **Privacy and security** of patient data are also critical concerns. Since AI often uses sensitive health information, it is important to protect this data from unauthorized access and misuse. Regulations like HIPAA and GDPR set strict rules for data protection, but ensuring compliance while using AI remains a challenge<sup>4</sup> <sup>9</sup>.

Another issue is the **"black box" problem**. Many AI models, especially deep learning systems, operate in ways that are difficult for humans to understand or explain. This lack of transparency makes it hard for doctors, regulators, and patients to trust AI decisions, especially in healthcare where safety is paramount<sup>4 8</sup>. **Regulatory hurdles** also slow down AI adoption. Regulatory agencies like the FDA are still developing guidelines for evaluating AI tools in drug development and clinical trials. This uncertainty can delay approvals and increase costs<sup>6 7</sup>. Ethical concerns include **bias in AI algorithms**. If the data used to train AI is biased or unrepresentative, the AI's recommendations may unfairly favor or harm certain patient groups. Ensuring fairness and avoiding discrimination is essential for ethical AI use<sup>4 9</sup>.

Finally, there is a need for **collaboration between AI experts and pharmaceutical professionals**. Successful AI implementation requires understanding both the technology and the complex biology and regulations of pharma. Without this collaboration, AI tools may not meet the real needs of drug development<sup>8</sup>.

Addressing these challenges requires ongoing research, clear regulations, and ethical frameworks to ensure AI benefits patients while minimizing risks.

#### 9.Future Trends

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the pharmaceutical industry is expected to grow rapidly in the coming years. One key trend is the development of even smarter AI tools that can handle more complex data and provide better predictions for drug discovery and patient outcomes<sup>2</sup>,<sup>8</sup>. For example, new AI models may help design personalized medicines that are tailored to each patient's genetic profile<sup>3</sup>.

Another future direction is the use of AI to create "digital twins" of patients—virtual models that simulate how a real person might respond to a drug. This could make clinical trials faster and safer by allowing researchers to test treatments in a virtual environment before trying them on real people<sup>6</sup>.

AI is also likely to play a bigger role in monitoring the safety of medicines after they reach the market, by analyzing data from electronic health records and social media to quickly spot side effects<sup>9</sup>. As regulations become clearer and more companies adopt AI, the technology will become an even more important part of pharmaceutical research and healthcare<sup>2</sup>.<sup>8</sup>.

#### **10.Conclusion**

Artificial Intelligence is already changing the way medicines are discovered, developed, and delivered. By helping researchers analyze large amounts of data, design new drugs, run better clinical trials, and improve manufacturing, AI is making the pharmaceutical industry more efficient and innovative<sup>2,8</sup>. However, there are still challenges to overcome, such as ensuring data quality, protecting patient privacy, and making AI systems transparent and fair<sup>4,9</sup>. With continued research, collaboration, and clear regulations, AI has the potential to make drug development faster, safer, and more personalized for patients everywhere.

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