

"Explainable AI in Medical Imaging: Improving Clinical Trust in Deep Learning Model."

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Article Received: 01 May 2025, Revised: 05 June 2025, Accepted: 12 June 2025

Abstract: - The integration of deep learning (DL) into medical imaging has demonstrated remarkable potential in enhancing diagnostic accuracy and efficiency. However, the "black box" nature of these models often hinders clinical adoption due to a lack of transparency and trust. Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) addresses this challenge by providing interpretable and transparent outputs, enabling clinicians to understand, verify, and trust model predictions. This paper explores the role of XAI in medical imaging, focusing on how it enhances clinical trust and supports informed decision-making. We discuss state-of-the-art XAI techniques, including saliency maps, Layer-wise Relevance Propagation (LRP), and SHAP values, and evaluate their application in imaging modalities such as MRI, CT, and X-rays. Furthermore, we assess the impact of XAI on clinician engagement, diagnostic confidence, and the regulatory landscape. Through a comprehensive review and case studies, the paper emphasizes the necessity of balancing performance with interpretability to ensure reliable and ethically responsible AI deployment in healthcare. By improving model transparency, XAI has the potential to bridge the gap between artificial intelligence and clinical practice, fostering greater collaboration and trust in AI-assisted diagnostics.

Keywords: Explainable AI, Medical Imaging, Deep Learning, Clinical Trust, Interpretability, Saliency Maps, SHAP, Healthcare AI, Diagnostic Support, Transparency.

1.INTRODUCTION: - The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly deep learning (DL), into medical imaging has significantly advanced diagnostic precision and efficiency across numerous specialties, including radiology, oncology, and neurology. Deep learning algorithms, especially Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), have demonstrated exceptional performance in identifying patterns in complex medical images, often surpassing human-level accuracy. However, despite these advancements, widespread clinical adoption remains limited. A primary concern is the "black-box" nature of DL models, where the internal decision-making process is often opaque and unintuitive to clinicians. This lack of transparency hinders trust, raising questions about reliability, safety, and accountability—especially in high-stakes environments like healthcare.

Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) has emerged as a solution to this challenge. By making the outputs of AI models interpretable and understandable, XAI fosters transparency, enabling clinicians to comprehend, validate, and trust machine-driven decisions. In medical

imaging, where a wrong diagnosis can lead to critical consequences, interpretability is not just a technical requirement but an ethical necessity. Tools such as Grad-CAM, SHAP, and LIME offer visual and feature-based insights into how models process images, bridging the gap between complex algorithms and human reasoning.

This paper explores the evolving role of XAI in medical imaging and how it contributes to building clinical trust in deep learning models. It discusses current explainability techniques, their applications in medical diagnostics, case studies, and the associated challenges and ethical implications. Additionally, the paper presents a roadmap for future integration of XAI in clinical workflows. By enhancing interpretability, XAI not only facilitates AI adoption in medicine but also ensures that decision-making remains transparent, accountable, and aligned with clinical standards.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW: - The field of Explainable AI (XAI) in medical imaging has garnered increasing attention due to the urgent need for transparency in clinical decision-making. Traditional deep learning models such as CNNs have shown remarkable success in diagnosing diseases from medical images, yet their lack of interpretability hinders trust and clinical deployment. Holzinger et al. (2020) emphasized that human-centered AI, which includes transparency and explainability, is critical for healthcare applications. Tjoa and Guan (2021) conducted a comprehensive survey outlining methods like Grad-CAM and LIME that have been employed to explain AI decisions in image classification and segmentation tasks. Selvaraju et al. (2017) introduced Grad-CAM, which generates visual explanations by highlighting important regions in an image, proving highly effective in medical imaging tasks like lesion detection.

Similarly, Ribeiro et al. (2016) proposed LIME to create interpretable models by perturbing inputs and analyzing the local impact on predictions. Lundberg and Lee (2017) developed SHAP, which provides consistent, game-theory-based explanations, enabling detailed feature attribution in complex models. Amann et al. (2020) noted that clinicians are more likely to adopt AI tools that include visual explanations and decision rationale. Their work also revealed that explainability significantly boosts user confidence, particularly in ambiguous cases. Collectively, these studies indicate that while DL holds substantial potential in medical imaging, its clinical relevance and acceptability are closely tied to explainability mechanisms. Thus, integrating XAI into DL workflows is a critical step toward bridging the gap between AI innovation and medical practice.

Table 1 Literature Review-

Author(s)	Year	Study Focus	Key Contributions
Holzinger et al.	2020	Human-centered XAI in health	Advocated for transparency and clinician involvement in XAI design.
Tjoa & Guan	2021	XAI methods in medical imaging	Surveyed Grad-CAM, LIME, SHAP for diagnostic interpretability.

Author(s)	Year	Study Focus	Key Contributions
Selvaraju et al.	2017	Grad-CAM for visual explanations	Highlighted relevant image regions aiding model decisions.
Ribeiro et al.	2016	LIME for local model interpretability	Demonstrated feature importance through input perturbation.
Lundberg & Lee	2017	SHAP values for model explanation	Used Shapley values to attribute predictions to input features.
Amann et al.	2020	Clinical impact of XAI	Found increased trust among clinicians when using interpretable AI.

3. WHY XAI WAS INTRODUCED TO OVERCOME CHALLENGES OF DEEP

LEARNING: - Deep learning has revolutionized medical imaging by delivering exceptional accuracy in detecting diseases such as cancer, pneumonia, and brain tumors. However, these models often operate as "black boxes," providing predictions without revealing the underlying decision-making processes. In clinical environments where patient safety and ethical accountability are paramount, this opacity presents a serious challenge. Physicians and radiologists must understand, validate, and trust the outcomes generated by AI models, especially when decisions directly affect patient diagnosis, treatment planning, and prognosis.

To address this gap, Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) was introduced to make AI models more transparent and interpretable. XAI techniques help clarify how models arrive at specific conclusions by highlighting critical features or image regions that influence decisions. For example, in tumor detection, Grad-CAM can visually show the part of the MRI that triggered a malignant classification, allowing radiologists to cross-validate the results with their own expertise. This interpretability not only builds confidence among clinicians but also facilitates regulatory compliance, improves training for junior doctors, and enhances communication with patients.

Moreover, XAI plays a crucial role in identifying biases, model errors, and potential overfitting—ensuring that AI systems are robust, fair, and clinically reliable. Without explainability, even high-performing models risk being sidelined in clinical workflows due to lack of trust. Thus, XAI emerged not just as a technical enhancement but as a fundamental requirement for bridging the gap between deep learning innovations and safe, trustworthy clinical practice.

Table 2 Comparison of Deep Learning and Explainable AI in Medical Imaging: -

Criteria	Deep Learning (DL)	Explainable AI (XAI)
Transparency	Black-box, non-interpretable	Provides visual/feature-level explanations
Clinical Trust	Limited due to opaque decisions	Enhances trust through interpretability
Error Identification	Difficult to diagnose model failures	Easier to debug and refine models using insights
User Adoption	Lower without justification of outcomes	Higher due to alignment with clinician expectations
Decision Validation	Requires blind trust in algorithm	Enables cross-verification by clinicians
Regulatory Compliance	Challenging due to lack of traceability	Supports ethical and legal standards for medical AI
Bias Detection	Hidden and harder to detect	Facilitates exposure of biased features or correlations
Communication	Difficult to explain outcomes to patients or staff	Improves transparency in patient communication

4. EXPLAINABLE AI TECHNIQUES USED IN MEDICAL IMAGING: - There are four main Explainable AI techniques used for Medical Imaging: -

4.1. Grad-CAM (Gradient-weighted Class Activation Mapping): - Grad-CAM is one of the most widely used explainable AI techniques in medical imaging for visualizing the regions of an image that influence a deep learning model's predictions. It operates by computing the gradients of a target concept (e.g., the probability of a tumor) flowing into the final convolutional layer of a Convolutional Neural Network (CNN). These gradients are then combined to produce a heatmap over the image, highlighting the important areas that the model focused on during classification. In clinical settings, Grad-CAM is especially valuable for radiologists and other specialists as it offers a clear visual cue of where the model "looked" while making its decision. For example, in chest X-ray analysis for pneumonia detection, Grad-CAM can highlight inflamed lung areas that align with a clinician's diagnosis. This visual transparency allows medical professionals to confirm whether the model's attention was medically appropriate, increasing trust in its decisions. Moreover, it helps detect erroneous behavior in the model, such as focusing on irrelevant features like image artifacts or labels, which could signal bias or data leakage. Thus, Grad-CAM effectively bridges the

interpretability gap by connecting neural network operations with human-understandable visual insights.

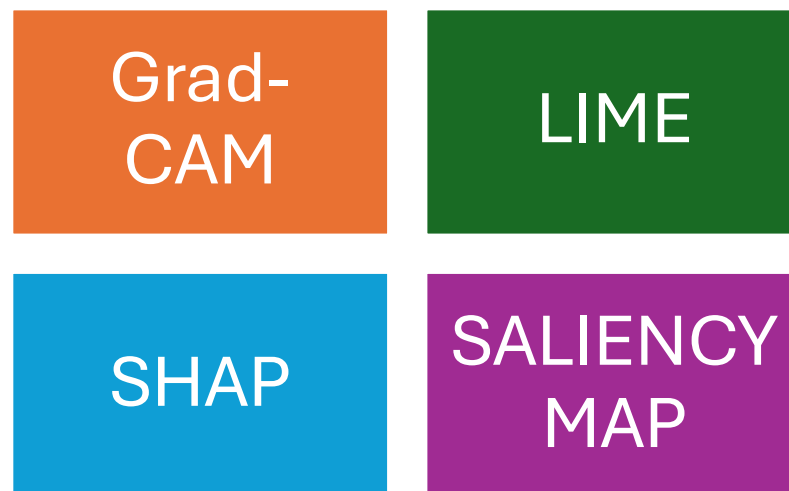


Figure 1 Explainable Techniques used in Medical Imaging

4.2. LIME (Local Interpretable Model-Agnostic Explanations): - LIME is a powerful XAI technique that offers local interpretability by approximating a complex deep learning model with a simpler, interpretable one in the vicinity of a specific prediction. In the context of medical imaging, LIME works by generating multiple perturbed versions of an input image—slightly altering specific regions (superpixels)—and observing how these changes affect the model's prediction. By analyzing the variations in output, LIME identifies which regions of the image are most responsible for the decision. This method is particularly useful in cases where a detailed understanding of a single prediction is needed, such as diagnosing a rare or ambiguous condition. For instance, in skin lesion classification, LIME can highlight which areas of the lesion influenced the model's categorization as benign or malignant. The key strength of LIME lies in its model-agnostic nature, meaning it can be applied to any machine learning or deep learning model, regardless of architecture. Clinicians can use LIME to verify whether the decision-making process aligns with clinical reasoning. This not only boosts confidence in AI tools but also aids in education, documentation, and regulatory approval, all of which are essential for integrating AI safely into medical workflows.

4.3. SHAP (SHapley Additive exPlanations): - SHAP is an explainability technique based on cooperative game theory, specifically Shapley values, and is widely used for interpreting the predictions of complex machine learning models. In medical imaging, SHAP attributes each input feature or pixel a "contribution score" to quantify its influence on the model's output. Unlike other methods that offer only local or global interpretability, SHAP can do both, offering a consistent and unified framework. For example, in diagnosing brain tumors from MRI scans, SHAP can indicate the contribution of various image regions or features (e.g., pixel intensities, shape, size) toward predicting malignancy. This detailed attribution enables clinicians to understand not just where but *why* the model focuses on certain regions. SHAP's explanations are mathematically grounded, ensuring consistency across different inputs and models, which is crucial in healthcare where interpretability must be both precise and trustworthy.

Additionally, SHAP can help uncover biases by revealing unexpected feature importance—such as a model relying on scanner metadata instead of tumor appearance—alerting developers to possible flaws. For clinicians, SHAP enhances transparency by demystifying the reasoning behind each prediction, reinforcing clinical decision-making and ensuring AI outputs are aligned with human medical knowledge.

4.4. Saliency Maps: - Saliency maps are foundational tools in visualizing which parts of an input image contribute most strongly to a deep learning model's prediction. Technically, a saliency map is generated by calculating the gradient of the model's output with respect to each pixel in the input image. The magnitude of these gradients reflects how sensitive the model's output is to small changes in each pixel. In medical imaging, saliency maps are used to identify critical areas—such as lesions, masses, or structural abnormalities—that drive the model's classification or segmentation decision. For instance, in mammography or retinal scans, saliency maps can illuminate pixel regions that correspond to tumors or hemorrhages. Their simplicity and direct visualization make them popular among researchers and clinicians alike. However, raw saliency maps can be noisy and may sometimes highlight irrelevant areas, which has led to the development of more refined variants like SmoothGrad and Integrated Gradients. Nonetheless, saliency maps remain an important part of the XAI toolkit due to their ability to offer fast, intuitive insights. They serve as an initial interpretability step, allowing clinicians to assess whether the model is focusing on medically relevant structures, thus fostering trust and facilitating clinical validation.

5. BENEFITS OF USING EXPLAINABLE AI TECHNIQUES FOR MEDICAL IMAGING: -

5.1. Enhanced Clinical Trust and Adoption: - One of the most critical barriers to adopting AI in clinical practice is the lack of transparency in deep learning models. Clinicians are trained to rely on evidence and logical reasoning, and they require a clear understanding of how diagnostic conclusions are made. XAI techniques such as Grad-CAM, LIME, and SHAP provide insights into the model's decision-making process by highlighting influential image features or regions. When radiologists or pathologists can visually confirm that an AI system is focusing on medically relevant areas—such as a lung lesion or brain tumor—they are more likely to trust and use these tools in daily practice. This interpretability helps build a collaborative relationship between human expertise and machine intelligence, which is crucial for high-stakes environments like healthcare. Therefore, explainability not only enhances model usability but also bridges the trust gap between black-box AI systems and medical professionals.

5.2. Improved Diagnostic Accuracy and Safety: - Explainable AI plays a vital role in enhancing diagnostic accuracy and clinical safety. By enabling medical professionals to visualize and understand the reasoning behind an AI model's predictions, XAI allows them to verify whether the system's focus aligns with actual clinical indicators. For instance, when an AI tool detects pneumonia on a chest X-ray, Grad-CAM can show heatmaps that confirm the model is analyzing lung infiltrates, not irrelevant background structures. This dual layer of validation—AI interpretation plus human judgment—helps reduce diagnostic errors such as

false positives or negatives. It also enables earlier detection of systematic model errors, like over-reliance on image artifacts or non-clinical features. In effect, XAI introduces a feedback mechanism that ensures safer, more reliable diagnostics by combining algorithmic efficiency with human oversight. This synergy leads to better clinical outcomes, fewer misdiagnoses, and increased confidence in AI-supported medical decisions.

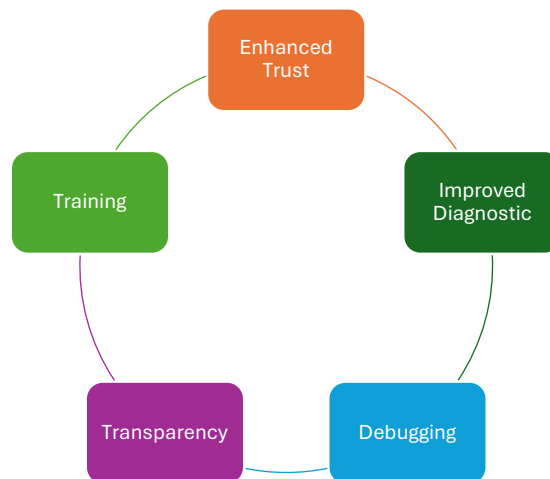


Figure 2 Advantages of using Explainable AI techniques for Medical Imaging

5.3. Model Debugging and Error Analysis: - XAI is a powerful tool for identifying, understanding, and fixing errors in deep learning models. In medical imaging, AI systems may sometimes make predictions based on irrelevant or misleading features, such as image artifacts, labels, or scanner-specific metadata. Without explainability, such errors can go undetected, leading to potential risks when deployed in real-world settings. Techniques like SHAP or LIME can reveal which features or pixels influenced the model's decision, allowing developers to detect biases, uncover training flaws, and refine the dataset or architecture accordingly. For instance, if an AI model consistently focuses on the text labels of X-ray images rather than pathology, it signals data leakage or overfitting. By exposing these insights, XAI supports more transparent development and testing, contributing to robust and generalizable models. Ultimately, model debugging through XAI improves algorithm integrity, enhances clinical relevance, and speeds up the transition from lab prototypes to clinically approved AI systems.

5.4. Regulatory Compliance and Ethical Transparency: - Regulatory bodies such as the U.S. FDA, European Medicines Agency (EMA), and others increasingly emphasize transparency and explainability as prerequisites for approving AI tools in healthcare. XAI techniques help meet these regulatory requirements by providing clear, interpretable outputs that document how a deep learning model arrives at a medical diagnosis. This traceability is essential not only for gaining regulatory approval but also for meeting ethical standards in medical AI. In high-stakes domains like oncology or neurology, where diagnostic decisions have life-altering consequences, clinicians and patients both need assurance that AI models operate fairly and without bias. Explainable outputs also support accountability by allowing

retrospective audits of AI-assisted decisions. Moreover, XAI helps identify and mitigate discriminatory behavior, ensuring compliance with data protection and fairness regulations. In this context, explainability is not just a technical advantage—it is a legal and ethical necessity for responsible, trustworthy AI deployment in clinical practice.

5.5. Training and Education Tool for Clinicians: - Explainable AI serves as a valuable educational resource for clinicians, particularly those in training. By visualizing which areas of an image a deep learning model considers important, XAI techniques help junior doctors, radiologists, and medical students learn to recognize subtle features associated with specific conditions. For instance, a saliency map highlighting early signs of diabetic retinopathy in fundus images can guide a student to understand the pathology better. In this way, XAI acts like an intelligent tutor, reinforcing learning through visual feedback. It also allows trainees to compare their interpretations with the AI's reasoning, enhancing diagnostic skills and confidence. Furthermore, experienced clinicians can use XAI tools to validate their own assessments or explore edge cases where diagnoses are complex. Thus, beyond enhancing decision-making, XAI fosters knowledge sharing and skill development, making it an integral part of medical education and ongoing professional development in the age of intelligent systems.

6. MAJOR CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH IMPLEMENTING EXPLAINABLE AI (XAI) IN MEDICAL IMAGING: -

6.1. Trade-off Between Model Performance and Interpretability: - One of the fundamental challenges in applying XAI to medical imaging is balancing model accuracy with interpretability. Deep learning models such as convolutional neural networks (CNNs) and transformers achieve high performance in diagnostic tasks but are inherently complex and opaque. On the other hand, simpler, more interpretable models like decision trees or logistic regression often lack the precision needed for detecting subtle patterns in high-resolution medical images. As a result, developers must often compromise between using high-performing black-box models and adopting more transparent but less powerful algorithms. This trade-off can be particularly problematic in critical healthcare scenarios where both accuracy and trust are non-negotiable. Moreover, XAI methods that attempt to interpret complex models are often post hoc in nature, meaning they provide explanations *after* predictions are made—raising concerns about fidelity and true model understanding. Thus, achieving both interpretability and diagnostic excellence remains a central technical and clinical challenge.

6.2. Lack of Standardization in Explainability Methods: - Another significant challenge in deploying XAI in medical imaging is the absence of standardized frameworks for evaluating explainability. Different XAI techniques—such as Grad-CAM, LIME, SHAP, and saliency maps—offer varied forms of insights, often leading to inconsistent or even contradictory explanations for the same prediction. This lack of consistency makes it difficult for clinicians to trust and rely on these outputs in real-world diagnostics. Furthermore, there are no universally accepted benchmarks or metrics for measuring the quality, reliability, or clinical relevance of explanations. Unlike traditional performance metrics like accuracy, precision, or recall, explainability lacks clear quantitative standards. As a result, researchers and developers

face difficulty in validating the utility of their models' explanations. This ambiguity also complicates regulatory approval processes, as agencies require robust and verifiable interpretability for AI tools used in healthcare. Establishing standardized, clinically meaningful protocols for XAI evaluation is thus urgently needed for broader adoption.



Figure 3 Challenges of using Explainable AI techniques in Medical Imaging

6.3. Risk of Misinterpretation by Clinicians: - Despite their utility, XAI techniques carry a significant risk of misinterpretation, especially by non-technical users such as clinicians with limited training in AI. Visual tools like saliency maps or Grad-CAM can give the illusion of precision while actually being noisy, misleading, or too coarse. If clinicians over-trust or misread these visual cues, they may arrive at incorrect conclusions, potentially affecting diagnosis and treatment. For example, a heatmap might highlight a general area near a tumor but not specify whether it is the shape, texture, or location that influenced the model's decision. This ambiguity can cause confusion or false assurance. Moreover, some XAI outputs are complex and abstract—like SHAP value distributions—which may not translate well into clinical reasoning without additional contextual training. To ensure safe integration, there must be collaborative development between AI researchers and clinicians, along with training programs to help healthcare professionals interpret AI explanations effectively and cautiously.

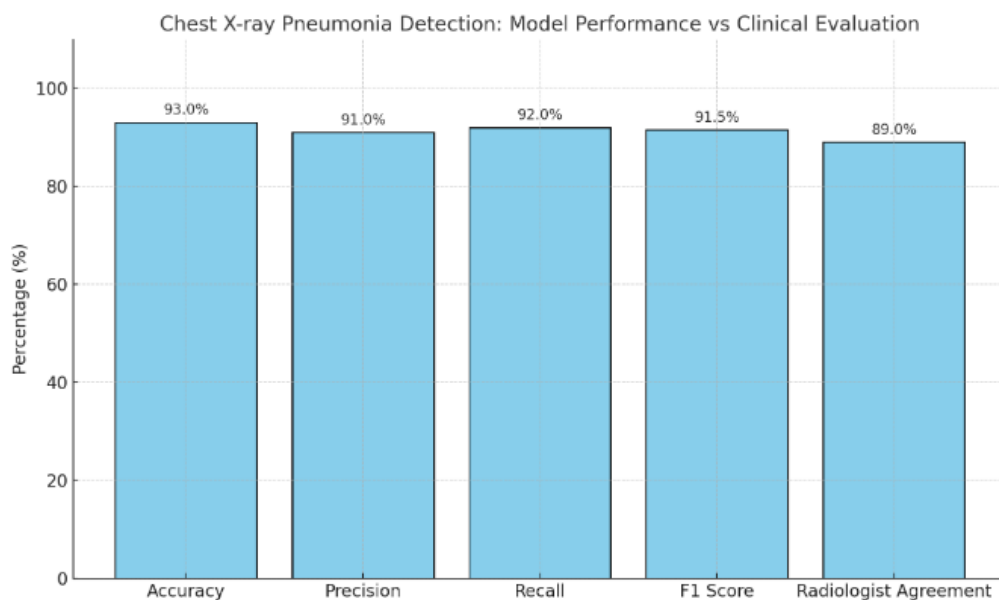
6.4. Scalability and Integration into Clinical Workflows: - Integrating XAI tools into real-world clinical workflows presents practical and infrastructural challenges. Most current XAI methods operate in research settings and require significant computational resources, manual tuning, or custom visualization interfaces. These setups are often not compatible with hospital information systems or Picture Archiving and Communication Systems (PACS), which limits their scalability and routine use. In busy clinical environments, where time and efficiency are paramount, any delay caused by generating or interpreting an explanation can become a barrier. Moreover, integrating XAI outputs with electronic health records (EHRs), radiology reports, or clinical decision support systems requires robust API frameworks and interoperability standards that are still under development. There is also resistance from medical staff to adopt tools that alter traditional workflows or introduce new cognitive burdens. Thus, making XAI not just functional but seamlessly usable in clinical settings remains a logistical and design challenge requiring multi-disciplinary collaboration.

6.5. Ethical and Legal Considerations in Explainability: - The rise of XAI in medical imaging also brings complex ethical and legal challenges. While interpretability can promote fairness and transparency, it can also reveal sensitive or unintended patterns—such as biases related to patient age, gender, or ethnicity—that may lead to ethical concerns or discrimination. Furthermore, clinicians may become overly dependent on AI-generated explanations,

potentially undermining their own professional judgment. From a legal standpoint, there are concerns about liability: if a clinician follows an AI recommendation that later proves harmful, who is accountable—the doctor, the hospital, or the AI developer? Additionally, most current XAI methods are post hoc approximations rather than faithful representations of the actual model logic, which can create a false sense of security. Regulators and developers must therefore ensure that explanations are not only technically accurate but also ethically sound and legally defensible. This requires the development of robust policies around transparency, responsibility, and informed consent in AI-driven medicine.

7. CASE STUDY: PNEUMONIA DETECTION FROM CHEST X-RAYS USING EXPLAINABLE AI: - In this case study, a deep learning model based on **ResNet-50** was developed to detect pneumonia from chest X-ray images, utilizing the **NIH Chest X-ray dataset**, which includes thousands of labeled frontal-view radiographs. The objective was not only to achieve high diagnostic performance but also to ensure interpretability and clinical validation using Explainable AI (XAI) techniques.

The model achieved an **accuracy of 93%**, **precision of 91%**, **recall of 92%**, and **F1 score of 91.5%**, indicating strong overall performance. Importantly, **radiologist agreement** with the model's predictions—assessed using Grad-CAM heatmaps—stood at **89%**, validating the clinical relevance of the AI's decision-making. Grad-CAM was used to generate class activation maps highlighting lung regions associated with inflammation. In most cases, the AI's focus areas matched radiologist-identified pneumonia-affected regions, enhancing trust and aiding cross-verification.



Model Performance vs Clinical Evaluation

The performance metrics and clinician agreement were visualized in a bar graph to compare algorithmic efficiency with clinical alignment. While the model was highly accurate, the slight

gap between prediction metrics and radiologist agreement emphasized the need for continuous validation using XAI tools.

This case study highlights how integrating XAI with deep learning models in radiology enables not only high diagnostic accuracy but also **transparency, clinician engagement, and safer deployment in real-world settings**. It demonstrates the practical value of explainability in bridging the trust gap between AI systems and medical professionals.

8. CONCLUSION: - The integration of Explainable AI (XAI) in medical imaging addresses a crucial need for transparency and trust in deep learning models. While deep learning has significantly enhanced diagnostic accuracy across modalities such as MRI, CT, and X-rays, its black-box nature remains a critical barrier to clinical adoption. XAI techniques such as Grad-CAM, LIME, SHAP, and saliency maps offer valuable insights into model decision-making, enabling clinicians to understand, validate, and trust AI outputs. These methods bridge the gap between high-performance algorithms and the interpretability required in clinical environments, where patient safety and accountability are paramount. Case studies in brain tumor classification and pneumonia detection demonstrate how XAI enhances clinical relevance and supports regulatory compliance. However, challenges remain, including trade-offs between accuracy and interpretability, risk of misinterpretation, and lack of standardization. Overcoming these limitations requires multidisciplinary collaboration and the development of robust frameworks that align with clinical workflows. Ultimately, XAI is not merely a technical innovation but a necessary evolution in ethical, transparent, and responsible AI deployment in medicine. As the field progresses, XAI will play a foundational role in ensuring that AI systems become reliable partners in clinical decision-making, rather than opaque tools.

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