

Project Management + AI can dramatically improve outcomes in Healthcare

Interview with Dr Deepa Bhide, MBBS, DCH, PMP¹

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Interviewed by Yasmina Khelifi

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Introduction to the interviewee

Dr. Deepa Bhide, MBBS, DCH, PMP, has over 20 years of professional experience where she has blended medical practice and research with IT and Project Management. She juggles consulting, training, and operations and is proficient in clinical medicine, project management, and healthcare information technology. Starting her career as a medical practitioner, she has worked with varied organizations before her current stint as Vice President, Training, Clinical Support Solutions for Inventurus Knowledge Solutions.

Deepa's growing interest and work in these areas, born from her day-to-day patient interactions, helped her view Project Management as a backbone of progressive

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healthcare. Her paper on "Patient Care - A Project Management Perspective" has received global recognition and acclaim. With a physician background as a solid foundation to leverage IT/PM skills and knowledge, Deepa has blended her broad-based experience and learnings to present a unified, holistic, and wholesome view of Project Management and Healthcare, a cross-domain confluence. Through various webinars, events, talks, and writings across platforms, Deepa has been an evangelist in championing global project management during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A Gold medallist from Osmania University for standing First in the MBBS course, she pursued her DCH in Pediatrics and Child health. Deepa has served various roles in local and global Project Management Institute (PMI) regions. She remains actively engaged with PMI and has been a participant and speaker for various national and global meetings and online events.

Deepa lives in Hyderabad, India, and loves traveling, singing, and experimenting with global cuisine. She can be contacted at deepa.bhide@gmail.com.

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Interview

Q1: First, thank you for accepting an interview request from PMWJ. You are a doctor. What was your journey to get an interest in project management?

Dr. Deepa Bhide (Dr. Bhide): Interestingly, you asked the same question I had from multiple people in 2007 when I initiated a conversation about my interest in project management and getting certified with the PMP. While innumerable instances from my clinical setup made me look for a consummate, appropriate, and tangible framework for my clinical challenges, here are a few situations that contributed to developing this interest.

1. As a full-fledged clinician busy in my clinical practice as a Pediatrician, I was an entrepreneur for starting a "Well Baby Clinic" setup. It is generally noted that patients visit the doctor when they are indisposed. There is a lesser interest in visiting the doctor for a preventive visit. This is true about Pediatrics, too. The Well Baby clinic was my idea to provide comprehensive healthcare services specifically for infants and young children, typically from birth up to around 5 or 6 years old, with a focus on preventative care such as regular checkups scheduled to monitor a child's growth and development, identify potential health issues early on, and ensure they are on track with developmental milestones, vaccinations according to the immunization schedule, provide nutritional guidance and advice such as breastfeeding, introducing solid foods, and addressing any dietary concerns. It also included guidance on early intervention in case any developmental delays or health problems are identified during checkups and family education. This whole continuum of care, from the first second of the baby's life

to adulthood, was a project. I wanted to ensure I was not just treating the baby at the point of care. Preventive care was more important than just the care for a disease. I was seeking a framework to help me execute my idea.

2. I had a health issue and needed to take a break from clinical work. That was when I took up a project for a knowledge process outsourcing company that involved working with a team of specialists and superspecialists for a US-based company on creating drug monographs. I had just moved from my clinical setup to the project-based setup, and the entire ecosystem was new. For various reasons (including my project management skills), the project was in red, and the project sponsors in the US summoned us to turn it green. I realized that my clinical knowledge was insufficient to help me with this task, and I needed support - quickly. I turned to my cousin, who happened to be my mentor too, and he suggested I check out PMBOK, then the 3rd edition, and attempt the PMP exam. I did the same. I contacted the PMI chapter in Hyderabad (PMI Pearl City Chapter), and the chapter team supported me with information and suggestions. They were intrigued, too, in terms of what is making me get on this path.

I passed the exam on the first attempt, which began my journey on the project management track, and I have never looked back since then. In project management, I found solutions to my questions as a clinician and as a project manager!

Q2: How do the medical professions perceive project management? Why?

Dr. Bhide: I will be blunt and truthful here. For the right reasons, as you know, the medical profession is a tightly regulated industry with guardrails that govern our actions and behaviors to support safe and ethical patient care delivery. From top to bottom, it operates within a complex web of frameworks and paradigms designed to prioritize patient safety and well-being. For example, clinical paradigms include care pathways, hospital accreditation centers, medical licenses and their governance, professional codes of ethics, and, most importantly, regulatory frameworks (e.g., HIPAA that protects patients' data). These frameworks and paradigms are constantly evolving to address new challenges and advancements in healthcare.

In my two decades of clinical career, I worked closely with my fellow clinical colleagues, including medical students. I understood their views, challenges, and the areas of support they were seeking to deliver patient care. These interactions shaped my understanding of how medical professionals seek project management.

That said, the perception of project management in the medical profession is mixed. This also varies by geography, place of care delivery (urban vs. rural), specialty of practice (general practice vs. specialists), presence or absence of medical insurance regulations, etc. Here are a few in detail.

Positive perceptions

- Medical professionals recognize the potential of project management to streamline processes, improve workflow efficiency, and ultimately lead to better patient outcomes. For example, project management can be used to implement new electronic health record systems or enhance communication between departments to improve efficiency and care delivery outcomes.
- Medical and allied healthcare professionals recognize that project management practices can foster better communication and collaboration between different healthcare teams, leading to a more coordinated approach to patient care.
- Most importantly, they understand that effective project management can help control costs associated with implementing new healthcare initiatives and mitigate potential risks.

Negative perceptions

- Some medical professionals might feel that project management prioritizes rigid processes and deadlines over individualized patient care. They might worry that focusing on efficiency could compromise the quality of care or lead to less time spent with patients. They perceive PM to be a “documentation-oriented process.”
- Due to a lack of understanding of the project management framework, I have seen skepticism or resistance to adopting these practices. There is a need to understand project management principles and how they can be applied effectively in healthcare.
- Busy healthcare professionals might lack the time to dedicate to additional project management tasks. The perceived administrative burden could outweigh the perceived benefits.

Overall, I think the perception of project management in the medical profession is evolving. As the benefits of a well-implemented project management approach become more evident and healthcare professionals become more familiar with its principles, its adoption is likely to increase.

Q3: How has project management helped you in your career?

Dr. Bhide: Project management is a part of my DNA and has empowered me to become a more effective physician, a project manager, a leader, and a professional in the corporate healthcare sector. Most of all, it has helped me become a better human being! It has helped me prioritize tasks, manage my time, and delegate efficiently. This has led to less stress and burnout, allowing me to focus on providing high-quality care to my patients. Project management skills are becoming increasingly sought-after in the healthcare sector. These skills have advanced my career, making me a strong candidate for leadership positions and being looked at as a “mentor” in the healthcare PM field.

Above all, I see a broader impact of my combined expertise in medicine and project management, allowing me to contribute to positive change beyond patient care. I now

lead strategic direction for my organizations, such as implementing new technologies, developing healthcare programs, or influencing corporate healthcare policies.

Q4: You have initiated a very [insightful series](#) about AI in healthcare in the PM World Journal. How is AI going to help the healthcare industry?

Dr. Bhide: AI has the potential to revolutionize the healthcare industry in several ways, from improving diagnostics and treatment to increasing efficiency and accessibility. AI is still under development, and its integration into healthcare requires careful consideration of ethical issues, data security, and potential biases in algorithms. Responsible implementation and ongoing monitoring are crucial to ensure AI is a powerful tool for good in the healthcare industry. The most significant impact of AI in healthcare is likely to come from its ability to collaborate effectively with human professionals. AI can leverage its analytical power while human experts contribute their experience, judgment, and compassion.

Here are a few key areas where AI is making a significant impact.

Enhanced diagnostics and treatment: Machine learning algorithms can analyze vast amounts of medical data, including patient records, imaging scans, and genetic information, allowing for earlier and more accurate diagnoses, identification of potential health risks, and personalized treatment plans. For example, AI-powered tools can assist doctors in analyzing complex medical images like X-rays and MRIs, highlighting abnormalities that the human eye might miss.

AI can automate repetitive tasks such as scheduling appointments, transcribing medical records, and managing administrative duties. This frees up valuable time for healthcare professionals to focus on patient care. For example, AI-powered chatbots can address basic patient inquiries and triage non-urgent cases, reducing wait times and improving patient satisfaction.

AI-powered solutions can make healthcare more accessible in remote areas or for patients with limited mobility. For example, AI assistants can facilitate telemedicine consultations. For instance, AI-based diagnostic tools can screen for diseases in resource-limited settings, leading to earlier detection and treatment.

Q5: AI, PM, and Healthcare are all big topics; how have you selected the specific things to focus on in your series?

Dr. Bhide: That's a great question, Yasmina! Since AI, Project Management, and Healthcare are all vast topics, choosing specific areas to focus on requires a strategic approach. I looked at the following while selecting specific points or concepts to include. I wanted to address critical areas of interest in a relevant, informative, and thought-provoking way for the target audience.

Audience and purpose – my target audience, such as physicians, project managers, healthcare administrators, or a general audience?

The series aims to educate, inspire, or spark discussions about the intersection of AI and PM in healthcare or as a means of information. I wanted to do something different.

Expert insights – I wanted the experts to bring forth recent advancements in AI for healthcare (e.g., AI-powered diagnostics, chatbots for patient support) and more. Not just benefits, but I also wanted to identify challenges faced by healthcare project managers (e.g., integrating AI tools, data security, and ethical considerations).

Showcase real-world examples of how AI and PM are used together in healthcare settings (e.g., improving appointment scheduling and reducing medication errors) to address the practical application of AI in healthcare. Tips on how physicians and project managers can collaborate to implement AI solutions effectively. I wanted to emphasize the importance of human-centered design and human-AI collaboration in healthcare.

Q6: Your approach of including interviews with various healthcare professionals this year has been somewhat unique; how have you identified interviewees?

Dr. Bhide: The Healthcare PM series in 2023 was a dialogue between Mary, an aspiring project manager in healthcare, and the author, a healthcare industry expert. I had very few interviews for this series. But for 2024, I wanted to do something different. I noted a deluge of AI-based articles, which are mostly generic in the various online resources, conferences, and other platforms, when I wanted to get to this topic of AI in healthcare PM from a roll angle. What critical roles interact with AI, and how can I showcase their thoughts? That was the premise of initiating the exercise in October 2023 on identifying interviewees for the AI series. For the 12 months of 2024, I had decided on 12 roles (clinical roles such as physicians, nurses, patients, digital health experts, hospital administrators, public health specialists, etc., data scientists/engineers, and project managers/PMOs. I also considered ancillary factors such as cybersecurity, ethics expertise, healthcare insurance, etc. I strived for diversity with a diverse range of interviewees regarding specialty, experience level, and geographic location to provide a more well-rounded perspective on AI in Healthcare PM. These formed the significant categories of the interviewees.

Here are a few methods that I chose to identify a strong pool of healthcare professionals with valuable insights to share on project management.

I looked at online directories to search for resources from healthcare and project management associations like the Indian Medical Association, reputed hospitals, professional bodies such as the World Health Organization, the Project Management Institute (PMI) chapter, and so on. These directories list member profiles with areas of expertise.

Attending conferences connected me to industry experts in both healthcare and PM. I networked with potential interviewees.

I also searched for healthcare PM hashtags on platforms like LinkedIn or Twitter, looking for individuals actively sharing content or participating in discussions related to the project management aspects of healthcare.

I review articles or blog posts on healthcare PM in reputable publications, including PMI's publications and PMWJ. The PMWJ community was my "go-to" community to reach out to. I identified authors who seemed knowledgeable and experienced and contacted them for an interview.

I contacted healthcare professionals within my network and asked if they would participate in my series. Some of them willingly accepted.

I had to be mindful of the busy schedules of these interviewees to accommodate their time constraints.

Q7: What would you consider some aspects of PM in healthcare or AI in healthcare to be most significant?

Dr. Bhide: With over thirty years of experience in healthcare project management and AI, I can provide some of the most significant aspects to consider.

Project Management in Healthcare

Healthcare PM goes beyond project completion. Focus on Benefits and value realization, such as patient outcomes. When advocating for project management within your healthcare organization, emphasize the potential benefits for patient care, staff efficiency, and cost reduction, which will improve clinician and patient experience.

Healthcare is a dynamic field. Effective PM in healthcare can help with flexibility and the ability to adapt to new regulations, technologies, and evolving patient needs.

Successful healthcare projects require collaboration between diverse stakeholders – physicians, nurses, administrators, IT professionals, and patients. PM framework facilitates communication and ensures everyone is aligned towards the project goals. Many skills used in medicine, such as communication, organization, and problem-solving, are also essential for project management, highlighting the importance of developing exchange and transferrable skills.

Healthcare PM involves sensitive patient data and complex ethical issues. PMs must be mindful of data privacy, security, and potential biases in AI-powered solutions.

I would also add that data-driven decision-making ability is a significant aspect to consider.

AI in Healthcare

AI's most significant impact in healthcare will likely come from its ability to collaborate effectively with human professionals, leveraging AI's analytical power with human expertise and judgment.

AI has the potential to revolutionize healthcare by analyzing vast amounts of data to identify patterns, predict disease risks, and personalize treatment plans. With the appropriate use of AI-enabled analytics, personalized treatment plans are not too far away.

AI can automate repetitive tasks, allowing healthcare professionals to focus on more complex patient interactions and decision-making, thus satisfying physicians' experience.

70% of the population in developing countries resides in rural areas where access to healthcare can be challenging. AI-powered solutions can make healthcare more accessible in remote areas or for patients with limited mobility.

That said, recognizing the challenges of using AI in healthcare is also critical. One needs to be aware of bias in AI algorithms, data security concerns, the potential for job displacement in healthcare, stakeholder acceptability, and the need for change management.

As these fields continue to evolve, their impact on improving healthcare delivery and patient outcomes will likely be profound. It would be a best practice to start small. Don't try to overhaul everything at once. Start by applying project management principles and AI to smaller, manageable tasks within your area of expertise.

Q7: Have you received many reactions to your series of articles? If so, in what ways and to what extent?

Dr. Bhide: Yes, I have received reactions through emails and comments. People across the globe have reached out to me with their comments and suggestions. I thank my readers and hope they continue to guide me with their thoughts. I have had two series in PMWJ so far.

My series on Healthcare Project Management in the PM World Journal in 2023 focused on the relevance of project management in the healthcare industry, taking examples of various roles, contexts, challenges, and upcoming areas. The series introduced Mary, a computer science graduate and project manager who wishes to make her career in project management in healthcare. Mary is interviewing the author, a physician, and a project management "guru," who is a healthcare industry expert. Here is how I classify them.

Project management professionals are not necessarily in healthcare but surely know the healthcare domain. This group comprises most of the comments. They either wish to make their career in healthcare project management or are looking at this blend of domains as spectators interested in how the framework is being applied, what challenges are realized and processed, what areas of opportunity exist, how the role of healthcare project manager is being crafted, and so on. The former group has more follow-up questions, and they reach out for specific instances and need more details on how, what, when, who, etc. Regardless of the group, the comments are interesting and

demonstrate the readers' engagement with the series and its characters. Some of them have contacted me to check if they could use the articles to create a healthcare PM course for academic disciplines in their universities.

Healthcare professionals are not in project management but are in the know-how of the project management practices. This group forms the minority as not many healthcare professionals read PMWJ or are PMP certified. If they start to read this resource, I am sure I will have a flood of questions from them. This group first asked me what made me become an advocate for project management. They wish to know the exact areas where I have applied and benefited from project management in clinical areas. They are not necessarily interested in generic applications. They want to know about specifics, data, and details. For example, they show high interest when I discuss how I applied project management to heal myself from a devastating ankle injury (featured in multiple webinars globally and two articles in the healthcare PM series on PMWJ in 2023).

My second ongoing series for 2024 focuses on AI in healthcare PM. It is a blend of three domains (AI, Healthcare, and PM), and I have interviewed industry experts in different roles in the AI-enablement of healthcare processes. The series has received an excellent response, and I have a flood of comments on the uniqueness of this series and how the role-focus approach demonstrates the 360-degree view of AI, a phenomenon that has taken over the world. The comments talk about how I have been able to showcase the “reality” and “practicality” vs what is ideal and generic. I thank my readers and hope they continue with the support they are giving my series.

Overall, I think there is a growing interest in this blend of healthcare and PM, extending to AI in healthcare PM. People are interested in the real vs. glorified need and want to ensure they commit their finances and resources for a positive ROI.

Q8: How would you advise other healthcare professionals to learn about or get involved with project management?

Dr. Bhide: I highly recommend that healthcare professionals and all those working in the healthcare industry learn and understand project management and get involved in practicing the work. It is essential to know how the work can be tailored to the specific needs of the healthcare industry and to deliver patients at the point of need and throughout the care continuum. While I know there has not been a healthcare-specific focus on some of the reputed events in the project management field, I am sure this upcoming area is getting due attention.

I would advise healthcare professionals to check out learning resources such as the numerous online courses and certifications available specifically for project management in healthcare. These courses offer a structured learning environment and can provide valuable credentials. The Project Management Institute's website (pmi.org), Project Management World Journal (PMWJ), and Library are great resources, too. Individual chapter websites are customized to the local needs and offer a more personal experience. There are also reputable platforms like Coursera, edX, and more.

Many books and articles delve into project management concepts and applications in healthcare. It would be good to explore resources from organizations like the healthcare-specific content from PMI, American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE), International Project Management Association (IPMA), and more.

I also recommend attending webinars or conferences offered by healthcare organizations or project management associations. These events can provide insights into current trends and best practices. The HIMSS conference at a global level, PMI's Global Summits, leadership institute meetings, chapter conferences that happen once a year, or Gyan Lahari by Pearl City Chapter are some great knowledge-sharing platforms.

Early in my career as a brand-new project manager, I started to get involved in the local chapter events as a volunteer. That gave me a glimpse into the depth of this world. For example, I volunteered for PMI Pearl City Academy and took numerous PMBOK sessions for prospective PMP certification aspirants. Other than this, I volunteered for many healthcare-related opportunities locally, nationally, and globally. This was a practical way to gain experience and realize where I could value.

If your healthcare organization has a dedicated project management team, see if you can shadow a project manager for a day or two. This will give you a firsthand look at their daily tasks and decision-making processes.

I strongly recommend joining a local chapter of the Project Management Institute (PMI) or a healthcare-specific project management chapter. These platforms offer networking opportunities, professional development resources, and potential mentorship opportunities.

By taking these steps, I am sure that healthcare professionals can gain valuable knowledge and experience in project management, ultimately contributing to a more efficient and effective healthcare system.

Q9: Has writing for the PMWJ been helpful to you personally?

Dr. Bhide: Writing for PMWJ is one of the best things that has happened to me, personally and professionally. I have learned a lot while publishing the articles and responding to the comments from readers. A few specifically helpful areas are as follows.

Researching and writing about project management in healthcare allowed me to showcase and document my experiences as a healthcare professional who has immensely benefited from adopting project management practices. It has also broadened my understanding of these domains' blends and complexities, allowing me to gather empathy and provide more comprehensive and informative responses.

Writing for a specific audience requires tailoring language and concepts to their level of understanding. Writing for PMWJ helped me research the audience (a mix of expertise, geographies, practices, organizations, etc) and their needs and tailor my articles to the

member base. This also helped me refine my communication skills and become more adept at explaining complex topics.

Researching and interviewing the industry experts for my series exposed me to new ideas and perspectives. The healthcare industry is ever-changing, and staying up to date on the current trends and challenges in healthcare project management would allow me to provide more relevant information.

Interacting with specific topics and audiences while writing for PMWJ has enhanced my learning and communication abilities.

Q10: How has project management changed your career or life?

Dr. Bhide: PM has transformed me in many ways, and I see myself as a different person now, both professionally and personally.

Project management has not diminished my passion for patient care; it has amplified it. Providing valuable tools for organization, collaboration, and strategic thinking has empowered me to become a more effective physician and advocate for my patients.

Project management has completely transformed my experience as a physician. While my passion for patient care remains central, the PM skillset has equipped me to approach healthcare challenges with a new level of efficiency, collaboration, and impact. I have now shifted gears from being reactive to proactive. Before PM happened, I often felt like I was constantly reacting to emergencies. Now, I can anticipate risks, resource limitations, and potential roadblocks. This proactive approach has allowed me to dedicate more time to each patient and their care. Also, medicine can sometimes feel siloed. Project management practices have taught me to collaborate and effectively bridge communication gaps between departments, fostering a more cohesive team environment that ultimately benefits patient care. The data-driven insights approach promoted by PM practices has allowed me to evaluate evidence-based decisions for patient care and their effectiveness.

Volunteering for PMI has helped me give back to the profession while gaining valuable skills and experiences. I have networked with industry professionals (both healthcare and PM), developed leadership qualities, and deepened my healthcare project management knowledge—all while supporting PMI's mission of advancing the project management field and my mission of championing healthcare PM.

Q11: Do you have a last message to PWJ readers, please?

Dr. Bhide: Absolutely! The world of healthcare is undergoing a transformative shift, and AI and project management are playing a critical role. New challenges (Eg, the recent COVID-19 pandemic that paralyzed the world) are knocking on our doors daily. It's like building airplanes while flying. We must improve ourselves in various dimensions of skills, ways of work, technical expertise, and more to succeed in

whatever we undertake. Expertise as a physician and project management skills create a powerful force for positive change in improving processes and patient care delivery, contributing to innovative healthcare solutions.

Regardless of your engagement with the healthcare industry and PM, you can contribute and benefit from learning about healthcare PM and now, specifically, AI. Embracing the power of project management makes a lasting impact on the healthcare system, healthcare corporations, and the lives of our patients.

Healthcare and PM can share a lot and help each other increase the depth of knowledge and applications in both domains. We, as experts, should be responsible for increasing the depth of this knowledge and bringing it to the forefront of readers, who can then use it for their benefit and the overall benefit of their projects (including patient care).

PMWJ offers a wealth of resources to help us on this journey, and I request readers to not only read but actively contribute to this wealth of resources.

Project Management is a force of positive change—actively engage with it and allow yourself to be changed for a better you!

About the Interviewer



Yasmina Khelifi

Paris, France



Yasmina Khelifi, PMP, PMI- ACP, PMI-PBA is an experienced project manager in the telecom industry. Along with her 20-year career at [Orange SA](#) (the large French multinational telecommunications corporation), she sharpened her global leadership skills, delivering projects with significant manufacturers and SIM makers. Yasmina strives for building collaborative bridges between people to make international projects successful. She relies on three pillars: project management skills, the languages she speaks, and a passion for sharing knowledge.

She is a PMP certification holder since 2013, a PMI- ACP and PMI-PBA certification holder since 2020. She is an active volunteer member at PMI France and PMI UAE, and a member of PMI Germany Chapter. French-native, she can speak German, English, Spanish, Italian, Japanese and she is learning Arabic. Yasmina loves sharing her knowledge and experiences at work, in her volunteers' activities at PMI, and [projectmanagement.com](#) as a regular blogger. She is also the host and co-founder of the podcast [Global Leaders Talk with Yasmina Khelifi](#) to help people in becoming better international leaders.

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