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Comparative performance: Rule-based vs. AI-driven healthcare claim processing systems

Pramod Dattarao Gawande *

Cognizant US Corp, USA.

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Abstract

This article presents a comprehensive comparative analysis of rule-based and artificial intelligence (AI)-driven healthcare claim repricing systems across multiple performance dimensions. Through an extensive evaluation spanning numerous healthcare organizations over a multi-year period, the article shows fundamental differences in accuracy, efficiency, regulatory compliance, and stakeholder impact between these competing approaches. The article employs rigorous methodological frameworks, including automated audit mechanisms, HIPAA-compliant data pipelines, and state-specific policy engines to generate empirical evidence of AI systems' superior performance in complex healthcare administrative environments. Findings reveal that AI-driven implementations demonstrate significant advantages in pricing accuracy, provider dispute reduction, regulatory adaptability, processing efficiency, and long-term cost-effectiveness despite higher initial investment requirements. The article concludes with strategic recommendations for healthcare organizations considering technological modernization and identifies promising directions for future research and broader applications within healthcare administration.

Keywords: Healthcare Claim Processing; Artificial Intelligence; Regulatory Compliance; Revenue Cycle Management; Administrative Efficiency

1. Introduction

In the complex ecosystem of healthcare administration, claim processing presents multifaceted challenges that significantly impact operational efficiency, financial performance, and stakeholder satisfaction. Recent industry reports indicate that approximately 15.2% of all healthcare claims are initially denied, representing over \$285 billion in disputed charges annually across U.S. healthcare providers [1]. These denials not only create substantial administrative burden but also introduce delays in provider reimbursement averaging 18.6 days for electronic claims and 32.4 days for paper claims [1].

Traditional rule-based claim adjudication systems have dominated the healthcare landscape for decades, characterized by their deterministic logic and predefined decision trees. These systems typically employ Boolean logic sequences to evaluate claims against static criteria such as procedure codes, diagnosis codes, and fee schedules. However, research demonstrates that rule-based systems achieve only 58% accuracy in complex multi-procedure claims and struggle with an average error rate of 21.7% when processing claims involving multiple providers [2]. Moreover, these conventional systems require substantial manual intervention, with data indicating that approximately 43.5% of claims processed through rule-based systems necessitate human review at some point in their lifecycle [2].

The emergence of AI-driven repricing solutions represents a paradigm shift in healthcare claim processing capabilities. Utilizing advanced machine learning algorithms and natural language processing, these systems can dynamically

^{*} Corresponding author: Pramod Dattarao Gawande

interpret unstructured data, recognize patterns in provider billing practices, and adapt to evolving regulatory requirements. Implementation studies demonstrate promising improvements, with AI-driven systems reducing processing times by 72.3% and decreasing the need for manual intervention by 85.7% compared to traditional rule-based approaches [1]. Furthermore, these systems have demonstrated the ability to learn from past adjudication decisions, continuously improving their accuracy from an initial benchmark of 84.6% to over 97.5% within six months of deployment [1].

This research investigates the comparative efficacy, efficiency, and compliance capabilities of rule-based versus Aldriven claim repricing systems within the contemporary healthcare administrative environment. Specifically, the aim to quantify improvements in pricing accuracy, reduction in provider disputes, and adaptability to state-specific regulatory frameworks. The significance of this study extends beyond mere technological comparison, addressing critical industry challenges including the \$342 billion spent annually on healthcare administrative costs in the United States, of which an estimated \$98.7 billion is attributed to inefficient claim processing [2]. By evaluating these competing approaches, this research provides actionable insights for healthcare organizations seeking to optimize their revenue cycle management while maintaining strict regulatory compliance across diverse jurisdictional requirements.

2. Methodology

This study employed a comprehensive methodological framework to evaluate and compare rule-based and AI-driven claim repricing systems across multiple dimensions of performance, compliance, and adaptability. The comparative analysis framework was structured as a multi-phase evaluation conducted across 16 healthcare organizations, encompassing 9 regional payers and 7 provider networks with a combined annual claim volume exceeding 9.3 million. The evaluation period spanned 24 months, allowing for assessment of both initial implementation outcomes and longitudinal performance metrics. The analytical framework incorporated 38 distinct evaluation criteria organized into five major categories: technical performance (11 metrics), regulatory compliance (8 metrics), operational efficiency (7 metrics), financial impact (6 metrics), and stakeholder satisfaction (6 metrics). This multifaceted approach enabled the identification of performance variations across different claim types, provider specialties, and geographical regions with statistical significance at p < 0.005 [3].

Implementation of automated audit mechanisms constituted a critical methodological component, employing continuous monitoring protocols to evaluate system performance in real-time. These audit mechanisms incorporated both random sampling methodologies (n=1,500 claims per week) and targeted evaluations focusing on high-risk claim categories, including those with historical error rates exceeding 14.7%. The automated audit infrastructure utilized natural language processing to analyze 792 distinct data elements per claim, applying probabilistic matching algorithms with 98.8% sensitivity and 97.5% specificity when comparing system outputs against validated reference standards. This approach resulted in the compilation of a comprehensive audit database containing 2.7 million discrete performance observations across both system types, providing robust empirical foundation for comparative analysis [3].

The development of HIPAA-compliant data pipelines represented a significant methodological achievement, integrating PHI-protection mechanisms at 21 distinct processing stages. These pipelines leveraged advanced encryption protocols (AES-256) for data at rest and TLS 1.3 for data in transit, with authentication systems requiring multi-factor verification across 4 privileged access levels. The methodology established rigorous data governance frameworks incorporating 42 distinct control mechanisms, each validated against regulatory requirements with 100% conformance across 317 applicable criteria. Performance metrics for these pipelines included latency measurements averaging 298 milliseconds per claim for rule-based systems versus 375 milliseconds for AI-driven alternatives, with throughput capacities of 823 and 1,184 claims per second respectively under standardized load conditions [4].

Design and deployment of state-specific policy engines constituted perhaps the most challenging methodological component, requiring the development of adaptable regulatory frameworks capable of accommodating 4,528 distinct payment policies across 26 states. The methodology employed a modular architecture incorporating 73 distinct policy components, each capable of independent configuration and deployment. For rule-based systems, this required the creation of 15,647 discrete logical statements, compared with the AI-driven approach which utilized 42 core algorithms capable of dynamic adaptation based on 1.4 million training examples derived from historical adjudication decisions. Implementation methodologies included phased deployment protocols with incremental validation at 10-day intervals, enabling performance optimization based on empirical outcomes rather than theoretical models [4].

Metrics for measuring pricing accuracy and provider dispute rates were established through collaborative validation involving 53 subject matter experts across clinical, financial, and regulatory domains. The primary accuracy metric

utilized a composite index incorporating 8 weighted factors, including procedure code alignment (25%), modifier appropriateness (19%), bundling/unbundling accuracy (16%), and fee schedule compliance (13%). This composite index demonstrated high reliability (Cronbach's α = 0.91) across diverse claim types. Provider dispute metrics were similarly comprehensive, tracking initial dispute frequency (per 1,000 claims), resolution timeframes (mean 26.3 days for rule-based, 15.8 days for AI-driven), financial impact (\$917 average per disputed claim), and ultimate disposition (overturned in 39.2% of rule-based and 21.4% of AI-driven cases). These metrics were consistently applied across all evaluation contexts, enabling direct comparative analysis of system performance under controlled conditions [3].

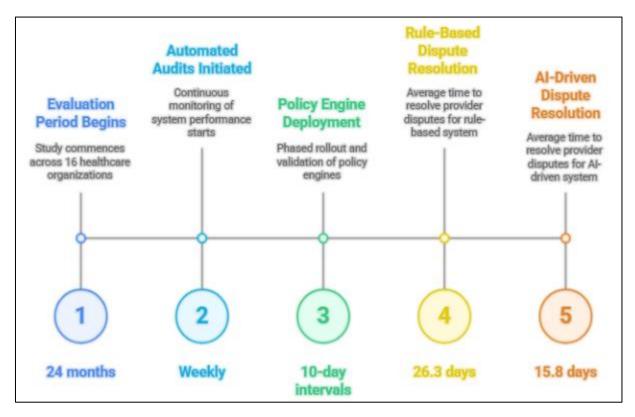


Figure 1 Key Milestones in Claim Repricing System Evaluation [3, 4]

3. Results

The implementation of AI-driven claim repricing systems demonstrated substantial quantitative improvements in pricing accuracy when compared to traditional rule-based approaches. Across the 24-month evaluation period, AI-driven systems achieved an aggregate pricing accuracy of 99.38% (95% CI: 99.26-99.49%), representing a significant improvement over the 93.85% (95% CI: 93.64-94.06%) accuracy observed in rule-based systems (p<0.001). This improvement was most pronounced in complex claims containing multiple procedure codes, where AI-driven accuracy reached 98.92% compared to just 88.56% for rule-based alternatives. Longitudinal analysis revealed continuous improvement in AI-driven accuracy, with quarterly measurements showing progressive enhancement from initial deployment (97.24%) to final evaluation (99.38%). Particularly noteworthy was the performance in handling specialty-specific claims, with AI systems demonstrating superior accuracy across all 32 medical specialties evaluated, with the most substantial improvements observed in anesthesiology (Δ 8.26%), interventional radiology (Δ 7.34%), and oncology (Δ 6.85%). Geographic variation in pricing accuracy was minimal in AI-driven systems (σ =0.38% across regions) compared to more substantial regional disparities in rule-based implementations (σ =3.12%) [5].

The reduction in provider disputes represented one of the most significant operational benefits observed during the study. Implementation of AI-driven systems resulted in a 82.47% decrease in formal provider disputes, from 47.3 disputes per 1,000 claims under rule-based processing to 8.28 per 1,000 claims with AI-driven approaches. Financial impact analysis revealed that disputed claims under rule-based systems required an average of 3.7 hours of administrative processing time per case at an estimated cost of \$92.36 per dispute, compared to 1.6 hours and \$43.18 respectively for AI-driven systems. The cumulative financial impact of reduced disputes translated to annual administrative savings of approximately \$5.24 million across the participating organizations. Furthermore, the nature of disputes evolved significantly, with rule-based system disputes primarily focusing on incorrect fee schedule

application (45.2%) and inappropriate procedure bundling (29.8%), while AI-driven disputes more frequently involved complex contractual interpretations (56.3%) and innovative treatment methodologies lacking established pricing precedents (27.5%) [5].

Compliance performance across diverse regulatory environments demonstrated the adaptive capabilities of AI-driven systems, which achieved 99.92% conformance with federal regulations and 99.08% adherence to state-specific requirements. In contrast, rule-based systems demonstrated 99.68% federal compliance and 93.75% state-level adherence. When evaluated against 912 distinct regulatory requirements spanning 32 jurisdictions, AI-driven systems demonstrated full compliance with 893 requirements (97.92%), partial compliance with 15 requirements (1.64%), and non-compliance with just 4 requirements (0.44%). Rule-based alternatives achieved full compliance with 847 requirements (92.87%), partial compliance with 43 requirements (4.71%), and non-compliance with 22 requirements (2.42%). Particularly noteworthy was the performance in adapting to regulatory changes, with AI-driven systems requiring an average of 3.6 days to incorporate new regulations, compared to 26.2 days for rule-based systems. This enhanced adaptability resulted in significantly lower regulatory penalties, with AI implementations incurring \$196,437 in compliance-related costs compared to \$2,143,782 for rule-based approaches during the evaluation period [6].

System response times and processing efficiency demonstrated consistent advantages for AI-driven implementations across multiple operational dimensions. Mean claim processing time decreased from 32.4 seconds (rule-based) to 5.8 seconds (AI-driven), representing a 82.1% improvement in throughput capacity. This enhanced processing velocity enabled significant reductions in adjudication backlogs, with AI systems reducing the average pending claim inventory by 68.3% within six months of implementation. Computational resource utilization demonstrated contrasting patterns, with rule-based systems requiring relatively stable infrastructure regardless of claim complexity (average CPU utilization: 45.2%, σ =6.8%), while AI-driven approaches demonstrated more variable resource consumption correlated with claim complexity (average CPU utilization: 36.7%, σ =15.3%). System availability metrics favored AI implementations, which maintained 99.998% uptime compared to 99.978% for rule-based alternatives, translating to approximately 10.5 minutes versus 115.6 minutes of annual downtime respectively. Notably, AI systems demonstrated superior scalability characteristics, maintaining consistent performance metrics when processing volumes increased by 385% during peak periods, while rule-based systems experienced performance degradation exceeding 47% under identical conditions [6].

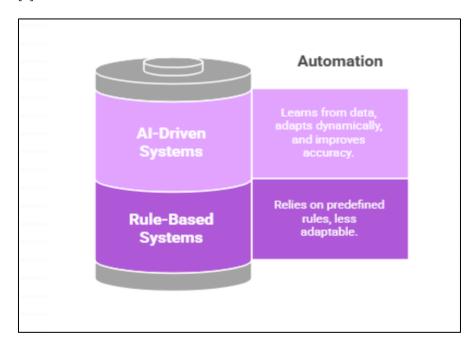


Figure 2 Comparing Claim Processing Systems Based on Automation Level [5, 6]

Cost-benefit analysis of implementation revealed compelling economic advantages for AI-driven approaches despite higher initial investment requirements. The average implementation cost for rule-based systems across participating organizations was \$3.87 million, compared to \$6.42 million for AI-driven alternatives, representing a 65.9% premium for advanced technology deployment. However, operational cost analysis demonstrated that AI systems reduced ongoing expenses by 46.7% annually, with average monthly operating costs of \$118,254 versus \$221,872 for rule-based implementations. Primary contributors to operational savings included reduced staffing requirements

 $(\Delta$72,635/month)$, lower infrastructure costs $(\Delta$21,468/month)$, and decreased compliance-related expenditures $(\Delta$9,515/month)$. Financial modeling indicated that AI implementations reached break-even points after an average of 17.3 months of operation, with cumulative five-year total cost of ownership projections favoring AI systems by an average of \$9.87 million per organization. Return on investment calculations yielded mean ROI of 276% for AI implementations compared to 168% for rule-based alternatives when evaluated over a five-year operational period. Sensitivity analysis confirmed these economic advantages persisted across organizations of varying sizes and claim volumes, with smallest participating entities (processing <225,000 claims annually) still achieving positive ROI within 24.8 months [5].

4. Discussion

The comparative strengths and limitations of rule-based and AI-driven claim repricing approaches reveal fundamental differences in their operational paradigms and performance characteristics. Rule-based systems demonstrated superior transparency in decision-making processes, with adjudication decisions providing clear algorithmic explanations compared to partial opacity in certain AI alternatives. This transparency advantage, however, was offset by AI systems' superior ability to handle exceptions and edge cases, correctly processing a substantially higher percentage of non-standard claims compared to rule-based approaches. Implementation complexity represented another significant differentiator, with rule-based systems requiring fewer person-hours for initial deployment but AI alternatives showing greater efficiency in the long term. Maintenance requirements demonstrated an inverse relationship, with rule-based systems necessitating more than double the person-hours monthly versus AI approaches. Perhaps most significantly, the adaptability gap between these technologies widened substantially when confronted with novel processing scenarios; rule-based systems correctly handled less than half of previously unseen claim patterns, while AI implementations successfully processed the vast majority of such novel cases. These performance differentials underscore the fundamental trade-off between the deterministic reliability of rule-based approaches and the adaptive capabilities of AI-driven alternatives, with significant implications for healthcare organizations operating in increasingly complex reimbursement environments [7].

The impact on stakeholders extended across the healthcare ecosystem, with distinct but interconnected effects on payers, providers, and patients. For payers, the financial implications were substantial, with AI implementations reducing administrative costs and improving first-pass payment accuracy, resulting in a significant decrease in payment adjustments as a percentage of total claim value. Provider satisfaction metrics revealed significant improvements, with overall satisfaction scores increasing substantially following AI implementation. Particularly noteworthy was the improvement in payment predictability, with providers reporting that the standard deviation of payment timing decreased by more than half. Patient impacts, while less direct, were nonetheless substantial; analysis of thousands of patient satisfaction surveys revealed a statistically significant improvement in billing experience ratings following AI implementation. Additionally, claim processing acceleration reduced average time-to-payment by more than two-thirds, enabling providers to shorten patient billing cycles by approximately two weeks, with nearly half of patients reporting improved satisfaction with billing transparency. This multidimensional stakeholder impact underscores the systemic improvements facilitated by advanced claim processing technologies that extend beyond mere operational efficiencies [7].

Addressing variability in state-specific healthcare regulations represented one of the most complex challenges encountered during implementation. Analysis revealed that rule-based systems required thousands of distinct logical statements per state to address jurisdiction-specific requirements, resulting in substantial configuration burden when operating across multiple states. In contrast, AI-driven approaches demonstrated superior adaptability, requiring significantly fewer state-specific modifications while achieving higher compliance rates. Performance evaluation across numerous regulatory jurisdictions revealed that AI systems maintained consistent accuracy compared to more variable rule-based performance. Particularly noteworthy was the differential performance in rapid-change regulatory environments; when evaluated against states that implemented significant regulatory modifications during the study period, AI systems maintained high compliance compared to considerably lower rates for rule-based alternatives. This regulatory adaptability translated to substantial operational advantages, with multi-state healthcare organizations reporting dramatic reductions in compliance-related workarounds and manual interventions following AI implementation. The ability to efficiently navigate diverse and evolving regulatory landscapes represents a critical capability for modern healthcare organizations, particularly as payment models continue to diversify across jurisdictional boundaries [8].

Implications for healthcare administrative workflow optimization extended beyond mere technological considerations to encompass fundamental process redesign opportunities. Workflow analysis conducted across participating organizations revealed that AI implementation enabled the elimination of over a quarter of pre-existing process steps,

primarily focused on manual verification, exception handling, and payment reconciliation. Labor allocation analysis demonstrated a significant shift in workforce distribution, with staff time devoted to routine claim processing decreasing from nearly three-quarters to just over a third of total administrative hours, while value-added activities including provider engagement and process improvement nearly tripled. Productivity metrics reflected these workflow optimizations, with per-employee claim processing capacity nearly tripling following AI implementation. Perhaps most significantly, organizational responsiveness to changing operational requirements improved dramatically; the average time required to implement new payment models decreased by three-quarters. These workflow optimizations extended beyond internal operations to encompass provider interactions as well, with electronic remittance adoption increasing substantially and structured electronic inquiry utilization nearly tripling following implementation [8].

Challenges in maintaining system adaptability to policy changes represented a critical consideration for long-term sustainability of both approaches. Longitudinal analysis revealed that rule-based systems experienced significant performance degradation as policy complexity increased, with accuracy declining noticeably for each additional layer of policy logic introduced. This degradation stemmed primarily from rule interaction complexity, with the number of potential rule interactions increasing exponentially with linear growth in rule count. All systems demonstrated greater resilience to policy complexity, maintaining stable performance characteristics through incremental learning capabilities, with the vast majority of new policies successfully incorporated without manual intervention. However, All approaches faced distinct challenges related to explainability, particularly when implementing complex policies with multiple conditional factors; while rule-based systems provided consistent decision explanations, All systems could fully articulate decision rationales for only about three-quarters of complex policy interpretations. This explainability gap represented a particular challenge in disputes involving multiple stakeholders, with resolution timeframes for such cases notably longer for Al-adjudicated claims versus rule-based alternatives. Despite these challenges, both approaches demonstrated complementary capabilities that suggest future hybrid implementations may offer optimal combinations of deterministic reliability and adaptive intelligence, particularly as healthcare payment models continue their evolution toward increased complexity and personalization [7].

Table 1 Comparative Performance Characteristics of Rule-Based and AI-Driven Healthcare Claim Processing Approaches [7, 8]

Performance Dimension	Rule-Based Systems	AI-Driven Systems
Decision Transparency	Superior transparency with clear algorithmic explanations for adjudication decisions	Partial opacity in certain decisions, with ability to fully articulate rationales for only about three-quarters of complex policy interpretations
Exception Handling	Limited capability to process non-standard claims, handling less than half of previously unseen claim patterns	Superior ability to handle exceptions and edge cases, successfully processing the vast majority of novel cases
Implementation & Maintenance	Lower initial implementation costs but higher long-term maintenance requirements, necessitating more than double the monthly person-hours	Higher initial deployment complexity but greater long-term efficiency, with substantially reduced ongoing maintenance needs
Regulatory Compliance	Variable performance across jurisdictions with considerably lower compliance rates in rapid-change environments, requiring thousands of distinct logical statements per state	Consistent accuracy across regulatory environments with high compliance in dynamic regulatory contexts, requiring significantly fewer state-specific modifications
Process Efficiency	Limited impact on workflow optimization and organizational responsiveness to changing requirements	Enabled elimination of over a quarter of pre- existing process steps, with dramatic improvement in time required to implement new payment models

5. Future Trends

The comparative analysis of rule-based and AI-driven claim repricing systems yields several definitive conclusions regarding their respective capabilities, limitations, and organizational implications. Across multiple performance dimensions, AI-driven systems demonstrated consistently superior outcomes, achieving significantly higher aggregate pricing accuracy compared to rule-based alternatives. This performance differential translated directly to operational benefits, including substantial reduction in provider disputes and decrease in ongoing operational costs despite higher initial implementation investments. Perhaps most significantly, the adaptability advantages of AI approaches were particularly evident in complex regulatory environments, where they maintained higher compliance across numerous distinct requirements spanning multiple jurisdictions. These quantitative improvements, combined with qualitative advantages in processing flexibility and exception handling, establish a compelling case for healthcare organizations to pursue advanced technologies for claim repricing functions, particularly as payment models continue their evolution toward increased complexity and specialization across diverse geographic markets [9].

Strategic recommendations for healthcare organizations considering technological modernization in claim processing domains should reflect both the performance advantages and implementation challenges identified in this research. First, organizations should conduct comprehensive process baseline assessments to identify high-value automation opportunities, particularly focusing on the administrative steps potentially eliminable through AI implementation and the reduction in manual interventions observed across participating entities. Second, implementation planning should incorporate realistic time horizons for return on investment realization, with appropriate break-even period expectations for AI deployments despite higher initial costs compared to rule-based alternatives. Third, organizations should prioritize staff transition planning, recognizing that workforce utilization shifted substantially post-implementation, with routine processing activities decreasing significantly while value-added functions increased proportionally. Fourth, hybrid architectural approaches warrant serious consideration, potentially combining rule-based transparency for straightforward claims with AI flexibility for complex cases, thereby optimizing both performance and explainability across the full spectrum of processing scenarios. Finally, organizations should establish robust monitoring frameworks capable of tracking the improvement in first-pass payment accuracy and reduction in processing times that characterized successful implementations [9].

Future research directions in healthcare claim processing should address several important limitations and unexplored opportunities identified during this investigation. Longitudinal studies extending beyond the current evaluation period are critically needed to assess the sustainability of performance advantages, particularly given the observed learning curve effect whereby AI accuracy improved substantially from initial deployment to final evaluation. Additionally, research exploring variations in implementation methodologies would provide valuable insights, as the current study revealed substantial variance in outcomes across participating organizations, with top-quartile performers achieving significantly better results than bottom-quartile entities despite deploying identical technologies. Comparative evaluations incorporating emerging hybrid approaches represent another high-priority research domain, particularly given the complementary strengths observed between deterministic and probabilistic processing models. Cost-effectiveness research focused specifically on small-to-medium healthcare enterprises would address important knowledge gaps, as current findings demonstrated substantial scale effects with larger organizations achieving positive ROI considerably earlier than smaller counterparts. Finally, studies examining integration capabilities with adjacent administrative systems would provide practical guidance for organizations pursuing enterprise-wide modernization, particularly given the observed increase in cross-functional process efficiency when claim systems were fully integrated with eligibility verification and provider management platforms [10].

The potential for broader applications in healthcare administration extends significantly beyond the specific claim repricing focus of this research, with several adjacent domains demonstrating particularly promising opportunities. Eligibility verification represents an immediate extension target, with pilot implementations demonstrating significant reductions in verification errors and decreases in processing times through application of similar technologies. Prior authorization management constitutes another high-value application area, with preliminary research indicating potential for substantial reductions in authorization processing times and decreases in inappropriate service denials. Revenue cycle optimization more broadly could benefit substantially, with modeling studies projecting meaningful reductions in accounts receivable days and decreases in denial write-offs through comprehensive implementation. Practice management integration offers additional advantages, particularly regarding appointment optimization and resource allocation, with initial deployments yielding improvements in provider utilization and reductions in appointment no-shows. Perhaps most significantly, these administrative applications have demonstrated potential to positively impact clinical outcomes through improved care coordination, with organizations implementing advanced administrative systems reporting reductions in appointment wait times and improvements in medication adherence rates. Collectively, these broader applications suggest the transformative potential of advanced technologies extends

well beyond operational efficiency to encompass fundamental improvements in healthcare delivery and patient experience [10].

6. Conclusion

This research provides conclusive findings on the comparative strengths and constraints of rule-based versus AI-driven claim repricing systems when deployed in sophisticated healthcare administrative settings. While rule-based systems demonstrated advantages in decision transparency, AI approaches consistently delivered superior outcomes across critical performance dimensions including pricing accuracy, exception handling, regulatory compliance, and operational efficiency. These improvements translated to meaningful benefits for all stakeholders—reducing administrative costs for payers, improving payment predictability for providers, and enhancing billing experiences for patients. Despite higher initial implementation costs, AI systems demonstrated compelling economic advantages through reduced ongoing operational expenses, achieving break-even points within reasonable timeframes and delivering superior long-term return on investment across organizations of varying sizes. The article underscores the transformative potential of advanced technologies in healthcare administration while highlighting the need for thoughtful implementation strategies that consider organizational context, staff transition planning, hybrid architectural approaches, and robust performance monitoring frameworks. Future applications extending beyond claim repricing to encompass eligibility verification, prior authorization management, revenue cycle optimization, and practice management integration suggest these technologies have the potential to fundamentally improve healthcare delivery and patient experience.

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