INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS INSIGHTS

Volume: 6; **Issue:** 1
Pages: 82-107
Accepted: 19 February 2026
Published: 06 March 2026

AI-Powered Predictive and Prescriptive Analytics for Intelligent Healthcare Resource Optimization

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Doi: 10.63125/5t121555

This work was peer-reviewed under the editorial responsibility of the IJEI, 2026

Abstract

This study has examined how artificial-intelligence-powered predictive and prescriptive analytics affects the optimization of healthcare resources and, through that mechanism, the performance of care delivery, and it has developed and tested a framework linking analytic capability to resource outcomes across inpatient beds, operating theatres, critical care, diagnostics, and the clinical workforce. The central problem has been that hospital resource management remains largely reactive and calendar-driven, so that capacity pressure is recognised only when it manifests as a full ward, a boarded emergency patient, a cancelled operation, or an unplanned overtime shift, by which point the available responses are costly, disruptive, and clinically consequential, while the substantial forecasting capability now present in many provider organisations is seldom converted into the allocation, scheduling, and rostering decisions that would relieve the pressure. Guided by five research questions, concerning how predictive and prescriptive analytics affects resource optimization performance, which resource domains are most effectively optimised, how forecast usefulness varies with decision horizon, what risks reactive capacity management carries, and whether resource optimization effectiveness transmits analytic capability into care delivery performance, the study has proposed a framework comprising five contributing constructs: clinical and operational data integration; predictive demand and acuity forecasting; prescriptive capacity and scheduling optimisation; clinical governance, explainability and equity assurance; and operational flexibility and workforce adaptability, with resource optimization effectiveness as the proximal outcome and care delivery performance as the distal outcome. A quantitative, cross-sectional design supplemented by a discrete-event simulation has been used, and data have been collected from hospital operations and capacity managers, clinical leads, nursing leadership, health informatics and data science staff, and finance and planning managers across academic medical centres, community hospitals, integrated delivery networks, specialty hospitals, and ambulatory networks. Out of 386 distributed questionnaires, 312 valid responses have been retained, producing an 80.8% valid response rate. The analysis has included descriptive statistics, reliability and validity testing, correlation analysis, hierarchical multiple regression, bootstrapped mediation analysis, and a simulation evaluation of census forecasting, bed-day utilisation, and the cost–service frontier. The findings have shown that all five constructs were significantly and positively associated with resource optimization effectiveness, that the model was significant, $F(5, 306) = 81.44$, $p < .001$, explaining 57.1% of the variance, and that prescriptive capacity and scheduling optimisation and clinical and operational data integration were the strongest predictors. Resource optimization effectiveness in turn predicted care delivery performance and partially mediated the relationship between prescriptive capability and performance, carrying 62.2% of the total effect. The simulation showed that prescriptive allocation reduced bed-day consumption by 11.6% per thousand admissions and shifted the institution onto a materially better cost–service frontier, but also that predictive usefulness decays sharply beyond a forty-eight-hour horizon.

Keywords

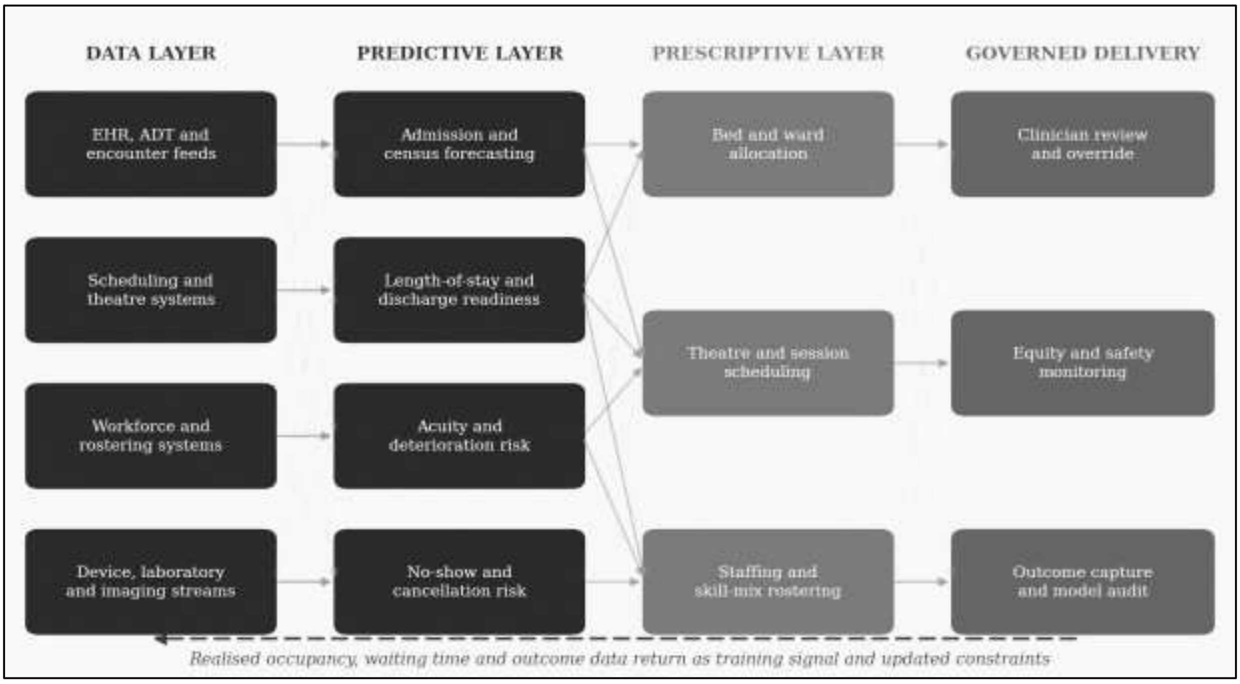
Predictive Analytics; Prescriptive Analytics; Healthcare Operations; Capacity Management; Resource Optimization; Patient Flow; Clinical Governance; Health Equity.

INTRODUCTION

Healthcare systems across developed and developing economies face a structural mismatch between demand that is rising and variable and capacity that is expensive, indivisible, and slow to expand. Hospitals cannot readily add a ward, commission a theatre, or qualify a critical care nurse within the timeframe over which demand fluctuates, and the consequence is that the practical question facing operational leadership is rarely how much capacity to build but how well the existing capacity is allocated. The costs of allocating it badly are borne in emergency department boarding, elective cancellation, unplanned overtime, and the clinical deterioration that accompanies delayed care (Hoot & Aronsky, 2008; Bates et al., 2014). This study examines whether the analytic capabilities now widely deployed in provider organisations are being used in a way that materially changes that allocation.

The evidence suggests a familiar pattern. Investment in clinical artificial intelligence has been substantial and its scientific achievements considerable, spanning diagnosis, risk stratification, and prognosis (Topol, 2019; Rajkomar et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2018). Predictive models of admission volume, length of stay, deterioration, and readmission are now routinely developed and, in a growing number of institutions, deployed at the bedside (Rajkomar et al., 2018; Escobar et al., 2020; Kansagara et al., 2011). Far less common is the prescriptive layer that would convert those forecasts into the allocation, scheduling, and rostering decisions through which capacity is actually managed (Lepenioti et al., 2020; Bertsimas & Kallus, 2020). The gap matters because a forecast that is not converted into a decision changes nothing: knowing on Tuesday that Thursday's census will exceed staffed capacity is operationally inert unless it is accompanied by a feasible, clinically acceptable plan for the elective list, the discharge pathway, and the roster.

Figure 1: Predictive and Prescriptive Analytics Architecture for Healthcare Resource Optimization



The structural reason that reactive capacity management underperforms is a matter of timing and of decision coupling. Capacity pressure builds continuously through admissions, delayed discharges, and staffing gaps, but under a reactive regime it becomes visible only when it crosses a threshold that forces action, at which point the remaining options are the expensive ones: cancel the elective list, open an escalation area, pay premium agency rates, or divert ambulances. Each of these is a decision that was avoidable days earlier at a fraction of the cost and disruption. The healthcare operations research literature has long formalised this, showing that bed, theatre, and workforce decisions are coupled across strategic, tactical, and operational horizons, so that a failure at one horizon propagates into the next (Hulshof et al., 2012; Cardoen et al., 2010). The premise of this study is therefore that the analytic capability that matters most is not forecast accuracy in the abstract but the systematic conversion of forecast into governed allocation decisions at the horizon where those decisions remain cheap.

Research on the individual components is substantial but fragmented. The clinical machine learning literature has produced increasingly capable predictive models but has concentrated on discrimination and calibration rather than on the operational decisions the predictions inform (Beam & Kohane, 2018; Kelly et al., 2019). The healthcare operations research literature has developed sophisticated optimisation models for bed, theatre, and appointment allocation but has typically treated demand as exogenously specified rather than as something a learned model supplies (Ahmadi-Javid et al., 2017; Bai et al., 2018). And an important critical literature has established that analytic systems in healthcare can encode and amplify inequity in ways that purely technical evaluation does not reveal (Obermeyer et al., 2019; Rajkomar et al., 2018b). These streams rarely meet. This study addresses that gap by treating prescriptive capability and its clinical governance as distinct constructs, testing their association with resource optimization effectiveness, and examining whether resource optimization transmits analytic capability into care delivery performance (Md Mostafizur, 2025; Shima Ali et al., 2025; Muhammad Zahidul, 2024).

This study is organised around five research questions. The first asks how AI-powered predictive and prescriptive analytics affects resource optimization performance, and it is addressed by characterising the mechanism and magnitude of the improvement across occupancy variability, theatre utilisation, boarding time, and overtime (Debasish, 2021; Mukut Kanti, 2020). The second asks which resource domains are most effectively optimised, and it is addressed by distinguishing domains by their share of controllable cost and the maturity of the forecasting available for them. The third asks how the usefulness of prediction varies with decision horizon, and it is addressed by comparing model families across forecast horizons against an operational usability threshold (Md. Abdur & Iftekhar, 2021; Mohammad Shoriful Hossan, 2021). The fourth asks what risks reactive capacity management carries, and it is addressed by rating those risks and decomposing them by type of consequence. The fifth asks whether resource optimization effectiveness mediates the relationship between prescriptive capability and care delivery performance, and it is addressed through a bootstrapped mediation analysis (Mohammad Abir Chowdhury & Tonay, 2022; Muhammad Zahidul & Amena Begum, 2022). The purpose is therefore both explanatory and prescriptive: to characterise the effect of analytic capability and the risks of reactive management, and to identify the capabilities and governance practices that convert analytic investment into clinical and operational outcomes (Md Mesbaul, 2023; Mst Shurovi, 2024).

The study contributes in three ways. Theoretically, it integrates the clinical machine learning, healthcare operations research, and algorithmic equity literatures into a single framework of resource optimization effectiveness, and it specifies resource optimization as the mechanism through which analytic capability reaches care delivery performance rather than treating the link as direct. Empirically, it tests this framework against data from practitioners across five provider types and four analytics maturity tiers, and it evaluates a simulation of census forecasting, bed-day consumption, and the cost–service frontier. Practically, it offers provider organisations a structured account of why reactive capacity management fails, which resource domains and decision horizons matter most, and how clinical governance converts a recommendation into an acceptable action. The remainder of the article reviews the relevant literature and develops the framework and hypotheses, formalises capacity dynamics and prescriptive allocation, describes the method, presents the findings organised around the research questions, and concludes with recommendations, limitations, and directions for future work.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

The literature review develops the theoretical foundation for the framework by drawing on an extended body of research organised into eleven thematic subsections that collectively map onto the five constructs the framework proposes. It begins with the structure of the healthcare capacity problem and the operations research tradition that has addressed it, then examines patient flow and queueing perspectives, the electronic health record as an operational data foundation, predictive modelling of demand and acuity, prediction of deterioration and length of stay, the prescriptive turn from forecast to allocation, simulation and digital modelling of hospital systems, clinical governance and the implementation gap, explainability and clinician trust, algorithmic equity in resource allocation, and workforce flexibility as the substrate on which optimisation acts. It then consolidates the research gaps and synthesises the framework and hypotheses (Muhammad Zahidul, 2024; Mukut Kanti, 2024). Throughout, the review maintains that resource optimization effectiveness, the capacity of a provider organisation to anticipate demand, allocate capacity efficiently, and adapt without clinical compromise, is jointly determined by the integration of its operational data, the acuity of its forecasting, the sophistication of its prescriptive decision-making, the governance under which those decisions are taken, and the flexibility of the workforce and estate on which they act (Shima Ali et al., 2024; Tonay et al., 2024).

The healthcare capacity problem and the operations research tradition

Healthcare capacity decisions have been studied systematically for decades, and the field has produced a stable conceptual architecture. The most influential organising contribution classifies planning decisions along two dimensions, the managerial horizon, from strategic through tactical to offline and online operational, and the service unit, from ambulatory care through inpatient care to emergency and home care, and it demonstrates that the operations research literature is unevenly distributed across the resulting cells, with strategic and tactical inpatient problems comparatively well served and online operational problems comparatively neglected (Hulshof et al., 2012). This matters for the present study because the online operational cell, deciding today what to do about tomorrow, is precisely where predictive analytics is most useful and where prescriptive systems must operate (Md Arif Uz et al., 2025; Md Mesbaul, 2025).

Within this architecture, three problem families dominate. Operating theatre planning and scheduling has generated an extensive literature addressing case mix, block allocation, sequencing, and the incorporation of duration uncertainty (Cardoen et al., 2010). Outpatient appointment system design has generated a parallel literature on slot design, overbooking, sequencing, and no-show behaviour (Ahmadi-Javid et al., 2017; Gupta & Denton, 2008). And critical care management has developed models for admission control, step-down timing, and the interaction between intensive care occupancy and downstream ward capacity (Bai et al., 2018).

This literature grounds the prescriptive capacity and scheduling optimisation construct and supplies the study's vocabulary for resource domains. It establishes that the optimisation methods required are mature and well characterised (Md Mostafizur, 2025; Md Mostafizur et al., 2025), so that the binding constraint on prescriptive deployment is not methodological novelty but the quality of the demand estimates fed into the models and the acceptability of their outputs to the clinicians who must enact them (Md Mesbaul, 2025; Mst Shurovi, 2024).

Figure 2: Healthcare Resource Domains by Share of Controllable Operating Cost and Forecastability

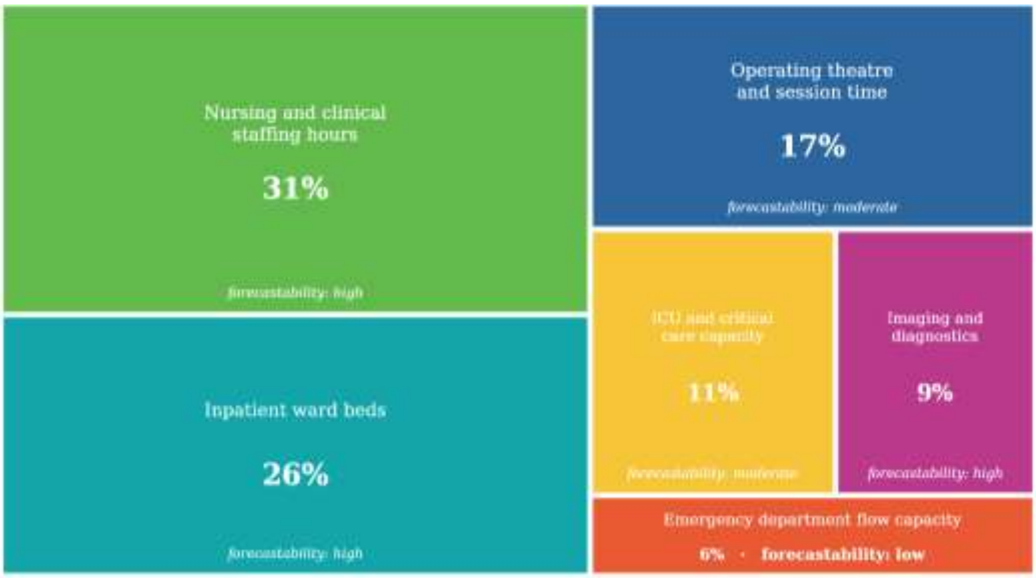


Figure 2 maps the resource domains this study addresses, sizing each by its share of controllable operating cost and labelling it by the maturity of the demand forecasting available for it. The map makes two features of the healthcare capacity problem immediately visible (Md Syeedur & Sharmin, 2025; Muhammad Zahidul, 2025). First, cost is heavily concentrated: clinical staffing hours and inpatient beds together account for well over half of controllable cost, so that optimisation effort directed anywhere else, however technically elegant, addresses a minority of the available value (Mukut Kanti, 2025; Sharif Md Yousuf et al., 2025; Shima Ali et al., 2025). Second, forecastability and cost share are not aligned. Emergency department flow, the domain with the least mature forecasting, is also the smallest cost share, whereas staffing, the largest share, is comparatively forecastable because it is driven by census and acuity that are themselves predictable. The map therefore identifies where the return on analytic investment is concentrated, and it structures the study's second research question.

Patient flow, queueing, and the dynamics of congestion

A distinct stream approaches hospital capacity through the lens of queueing and flow, treating the institution as a network of service stations through which patients move and in which congestion at one station propagates to others. This literature has established that emergency department crowding is predominantly an output problem rather than an input problem, driven by the unavailability of inpatient beds for admitted patients rather than by the volume of arrivals, which reframes boarding as a whole-hospital capacity failure rather than a departmental one (Hoot & Aronsky, 2008).

Empirical and analytical work has since characterised the behavioural and stochastic features that distinguish healthcare queues from industrial ones, including patient abandonment under waiting, time-varying arrival intensity, and service rates that respond to congestion, all of which complicate the direct application of classical queueing results (Batt & Terwiesch, 2015; Armony et al., 2015). A parallel line has examined the interaction between demand variability and staffing decisions, showing that the newsvendor logic applied to nurse staffing produces systematically different prescriptions from deterministic ratio-based planning (Green et al., 2013).

This literature contributes to the framework's treatment of timing and to the resource optimization effectiveness construct itself. It establishes that congestion is a system property rather than a local one, so that an optimisation confined to a single department will displace rather than resolve the pressure, and it establishes that variability, not the mean, drives the capacity requirement, which is the specific quantity that better forecasting can reduce (Md Mostafizur et al., 2025).

The electronic health record as an operational data foundation

All analytic capability rests on data, and the healthcare case is distinctive in that the richest data source, the electronic health record, was designed for clinical documentation and billing rather than for operational analysis. The literature has documented the consequences: operationally critical fields such as expected discharge date, bed status, and staffing assignment are frequently free-text, inconsistently completed, or held in ancillary systems that do not reconcile with the record (Bates et al., 2014; Shilo et al., 2020). Work on deep learning over raw record data has shown that predictive performance improves substantially when models are trained on the full longitudinal record rather than on curated variable sets, but the same work makes clear the engineering effort that standardising and sequencing such data requires (Rajkomar et al., 2018).

Beyond the record itself, operational optimisation requires data that the record does not hold: real-time bed state, theatre list status, roster and skill mix, equipment availability, and transport. Integrating these is an organisational as much as a technical problem, and reviews of AI implementation in health systems have consistently identified data infrastructure and interoperability as the dominant reported barrier, ahead of algorithmic capability (Petersson et al., 2022; Sun & Medaglia, 2019).

This literature grounds the clinical and operational data integration construct. It establishes that this construct is a precondition rather than a complement: an optimiser operating on a stale or partial picture of the current bed state will produce confident allocations that the institution cannot execute, and will do so at greater scale and speed than a human bed manager working from a ward round (Muhammad Zahidul & Amena Begum, 2022; Md Mesbaul, 2023).

Predictive modelling of demand, census, and acuity

The predictive layer supplies the forecasts on which allocation depends, and the literature spans several forecasting targets. Aggregate demand forecasting predicts arrivals and census at the ward, service, or institution level, drawing on seasonality, day-of-week effects, and referral patterns. Patient-level forecasting predicts length of stay, discharge readiness, and disposition, which together determine how a given census will evolve. And appointment-level forecasting predicts non-attendance and cancellation, which determines the effective capacity of a scheduled session (Ahmadi-Javid et al., 2017; Bates et al., 2014).

The general clinical machine learning literature bears directly on these tasks, establishing both the achievable performance and its limits (Topol, 2019; Rajkomar et al., 2019; Rajpurkar et al., 2022). Two findings recur and shape the present study. First, discrimination degrades as the prediction horizon lengthens, because the informative signal in the recent record decays and the space of intervening events widens. Second, models transfer poorly across institutions, since case mix, documentation practice, and operational policy differ, so that performance reported at one site is a weak guide to performance at another (Futoma et al., 2020; Collins & Moons, 2019).

This literature grounds the predictive demand and acuity forecasting construct and supplies the study's third research question. It establishes that the operationally relevant question is not whether a model is accurate but whether it is accurate at the horizon at which the corresponding decision must be taken, which is a different and more demanding criterion (Debasish, 2021; Tonay et al., 2024).

Deterioration, length of stay, and patient-level prediction in operation

A more mature subset of this literature concerns patient-level prediction deployed in live clinical operation. Comparative work has shown that machine learning methods outperform conventional early warning scores for predicting clinical deterioration, with the margin largest at the higher-specificity operating points at which alerts are practically usable (Churpek et al., 2016). Large-scale deployment studies have demonstrated that automated deterioration identification integrated into clinical workflow, with a defined response pathway, is associated with improved outcomes, which is among the strongest available evidence that such systems can affect care rather than merely describe it (Escobar et al., 2020).

Readmission prediction has followed a different trajectory. Systematic review established early that readmission models generally achieve poor discrimination, and subsequent work has largely confirmed this, which is instructive because readmission is the target for which the strongest financial incentives exist (Kansagara et al., 2011). The contrast with deterioration prediction is explanatory rather than incidental: deterioration is proximate, physiologically driven, and densely observed, whereas readmission depends on social, behavioural, and community factors that the hospital record does not capture.

This literature refines the predictive construct and anticipates the study's findings on domain differences. It establishes that predictive usefulness in healthcare operations is determined less by algorithmic sophistication than by whether the causal drivers of the target are represented in the available data, which is a property of the target rather than of the method (Mohammad Shoriful Hossan, 2021).

From prediction to prescription: the optimisation turn

The prescriptive layer converts forecast into allocation. Methodologically, the field distinguishes descriptive analytics, which characterises what has happened, predictive analytics, which forecasts what will happen, and prescriptive analytics, which determines what should be done subject to an explicit objective and constraint set (Lepenioti et al., 2020). The important methodological development of recent years has been the integration of machine learning with optimisation, so that the uncertainty characterisation feeding the optimiser is learned from data rather than assumed, and decisions are derived from conditional distributions rather than from point forecasts passed downstream (Bertsimas & Kallus, 2020).

In healthcare the prescriptive problem carries constraints that are unusual in their rigidity. Clinical safety imposes minimum staffing ratios and skill-mix requirements that cannot be traded against cost. Specialty and licensure restrict which staff and which theatres can serve which patients. Regulatory and contractual targets impose access thresholds. And patient-level equity considerations, discussed below, impose constraints that are difficult to formalise but consequential when violated (Hulshof et al., 2012; Cardoen et al., 2010). A recommendation that violates any of these is not a suboptimal recommendation but an unusable one.

This literature completes the prescriptive construct. It establishes that the value of prescriptive analytics in healthcare depends on the completeness with which these clinical and regulatory constraints have been encoded, and that this encoding, rather than solver selection, is where implementation effort is properly concentrated (Md Syeedur & Sharmin, 2025).

Simulation and digital modelling of hospital systems

A complementary methodological tradition uses simulation rather than closed-form optimisation to evaluate capacity policies. Discrete-event simulation has been applied extensively to hospital performance modelling, and reviews have documented both its analytic strengths, in representing stochastic, multi-resource, path-dependent patient journeys that resist analytical solution, and its persistent implementation weakness, namely that a large proportion of published models are never used by the organisations they were built for (Günal & Pidd, 2010).

The pandemic period substantially raised the profile of this work, as institutions required rapid, locally calibrated projections of bed, ventilator, and staffing requirements under conditions in which historical patterns were uninformative. Locally informed simulation approaches proved more useful than generic epidemiological projections precisely because they incorporated the institution's own case mix, length-of-stay distribution, and capacity structure (Weissman et al., 2020). This experience is instructive for the framework because it demonstrated that the same institutions could act decisively on model output when the decision pathway was clear, which is a governance property rather than an analytic one.

This literature contributes to both the prescriptive construct and the study's method, which uses simulation to evaluate the mechanism the survey measures perceptually. It establishes that modelling capability without an established route into decision-making produces analysis rather than change (Mukut Kanti, 2025).

Clinical governance and the implementation gap

A substantial critical literature addresses why demonstrated model performance so frequently fails to become clinical or operational benefit. The identified obstacles are consistent across reviews: absence of a defined action pathway attached to the prediction, workflow disruption, alert burden and consequent fatigue, unclear accountability for acting on model output, and the absence of prospective evaluation (Kelly et al., 2019; Wiens et al., 2019; Petersson et al., 2022). Reporting standards work has argued in parallel that the evidentiary base for clinical prediction models is weakened by incomplete and inconsistent reporting, which impedes both replication and safe adoption (Collins & Moons, 2019).

Constructive responses have emerged. Proposals for standardised model documentation, presenting to end users the intended population, performance, limitations, and appropriate use of a deployed model, address the specific problem that clinicians are asked to rely on systems whose provenance and boundaries they cannot inspect (Sendak et al., 2020). Broader implementation roadmaps have set out the organisational conditions under which machine learning can be introduced into care responsibly (Wiens et al., 2019; Davenport & Kalakota, 2019).

This literature grounds the clinical governance, explainability and equity assurance construct. It establishes that governance is not overhead surrounding the analytic system but a determinant of whether it produces benefit at all, and that the specific governance objects that matter are the defined action pathway, the allocation of decision rights, the documentation of model boundaries, and the mechanism by which a clinician can override and have the override recorded (Md. Abdur & Iftekhar, 2021).

Explainability, trust, and the clinician–system boundary

Where the governance literature addresses institutional conditions, a related stream addresses the individual decision. Model-agnostic explanation methods attribute a prediction to its inputs through local surrogate models or additive feature attribution (Ribeiro et al., 2016; Lundberg & Lee, 2017; Guidotti et al., 2018), and an influential counter-argument holds that for high-stakes decisions inherently interpretable models should be preferred to post-hoc explanation of opaque ones (Rudin, 2019).

In healthcare resource allocation this debate takes a specific and consequential form. A recommendation to defer an elective case, move a patient between wards, or alter a roster affects identifiable individuals, and the clinician asked to enact it retains professional accountability for the consequences. Without an account of what drove the recommendation, that clinician either complies with a system whose reasoning is inaccessible, thereby delegating accountable judgement to an uninspectable process, or overrides routinely, in which case the analytic investment yields nothing. The implementation literature identifies this boundary as a primary determinant of realised benefit (Kelly et al., 2019; Sendak et al., 2020).

This subsection contributes to the governance construct and shapes the study's method, which pairs prescriptive recommendations with feature-attribution explanations so that the review gate can be modelled as conditional on explanation quality rather than as unconditional acceptance (Sharif Md Yousuf et al., 2025).

Algorithmic equity in resource allocation

Resource allocation is distributive by construction, and a critical literature has established that analytic allocation can encode inequity in ways that conventional evaluation does not surface. The most consequential demonstration concerns a widely deployed population health algorithm that used historical healthcare expenditure as a proxy for health need and thereby systematically understated the needs of Black patients, who had historically received less care at equivalent levels of illness; the bias arose not from the algorithm but from the choice of label (Obermeyer et al., 2019).

Subsequent work has generalised the lesson and proposed remedies, including explicit fairness objectives, disaggregated performance evaluation across patient subgroups, and scrutiny of the construct validity of the outcome being predicted (Rajkomar et al., 2018b; Chen et al., 2020; Parikh et al., 2019). For operational allocation specifically the risk is direct: a scheduling system that optimises throughput by deprioritising patients with higher predicted non-attendance will systematically disadvantage those whose non-attendance reflects transport, caring, or employment constraints, converting a social disadvantage into an allocated one.

This literature is the reason the framework treats equity assurance as part of the governance construct rather than as an ethical postscript. It establishes that equity in analytic allocation is a measurable operational property requiring disaggregated monitoring, and that its absence is not detected by aggregate performance metrics (Shima Ali et al., 2024; Muhammad Zahidul, 2025).

Workforce flexibility and the substrate of optimisation

A recommendation is inert without the latitude to enact it, and in healthcare that latitude is predominantly a workforce property. The staffing literature has established that the capacity to move staff across wards, extend or contract sessions, and vary skill mix determines how much of a theoretically available optimisation can be realised, and that this capacity is constrained by licensure, competency, rostering agreements, and the fixed lead times of recruitment and training (Green et al., 2013; Bai et al., 2018).

The critical observation for this study is that flexibility, like network latitude in other sectors, is largely established before it is needed. Cross-training programmes, bank and float pools, flexible session agreements, and surge escalation plans are provisioned over months, whereas the analytic capability that exploits them improves continuously. Analytic and workforce investment therefore have asymmetric time structures, and an institution that has invested in the former without the latter will find its optimiser recommending reallocations that its rosters and agreements do not permit (Hulshof et al., 2012).

This literature grounds the operational flexibility and workforce adaptability construct and explains why the framework treats it as a distinct contributor rather than folding it into the prescriptive construct (Md Arif Uz et al., 2025).

Research gaps and the contribution of the present study

Read together, these streams leave four gaps that the present study addresses. First, the clinical machine learning and healthcare operations research literatures have developed in parallel: the former optimises predictive performance without specifying the allocation decision the prediction serves, the latter optimises allocation while treating demand as exogenously given. Second, the analytics literature in healthcare has not systematically distinguished predictive from prescriptive maturity, despite strong theoretical reason to expect that only the latter changes what an institution does. Third, forecast evaluation has focused on discrimination at a single horizon rather than on usefulness across the horizons at which the corresponding decisions must be taken, which is the operationally binding criterion. Fourth, equity in analytic resource allocation has been powerfully demonstrated as a risk but seldom operationalised as a measurable governance capability and tested as a determinant of outcomes.

The present study addresses these gaps by proposing an integrated framework in which prescriptive capability and its clinical governance are distinct constructs, by measuring it against practitioner assessment across five provider types, by evaluating a simulation in which horizon-dependent forecast usefulness and the cost–service frontier are primary outcomes, and by testing the mediating path from analytic capability through resource optimization to care delivery performance (Md Mostafizur, 2025; Muhammad Zahidul, 2024).

Synthesis: the resource optimization framework and hypotheses

Synthesising the eleven streams yields the framework this study tests. The framework holds that resource optimization effectiveness, the capacity of a provider organisation to anticipate demand, allocate capacity efficiently, and adapt without clinical compromise, is jointly determined by five constructs: clinical and operational data integration; predictive demand and acuity forecasting; prescriptive capacity and scheduling optimisation; clinical governance, explainability and equity assurance; and operational flexibility and workforce adaptability. A deficiency in any one undermines the whole: without integrated data the system optimises against the wrong state, without forecasting it observes demand too late, without prescriptive capability it cannot convert observation into allocation, without governance its recommendations are neither trusted nor equitable, and without workforce flexibility they cannot be enacted. The framework further holds that these capabilities affect care delivery performance not directly but through resource optimization effectiveness.

From the framework, eight hypotheses are derived. H1: Clinical and operational data integration is positively associated with resource optimization effectiveness. H2: Predictive demand and acuity forecasting is positively associated with resource optimization effectiveness. H3: Prescriptive capacity and scheduling optimisation is positively associated with resource optimization effectiveness. H4: Clinical governance, explainability and equity assurance is positively associated with resource optimization effectiveness. H5: Operational flexibility and workforce adaptability is positively associated with resource optimization effectiveness. H6: The five constructs jointly explain a significant proportion of the variance in resource optimization effectiveness. H7: Resource optimization effectiveness is positively associated with care delivery performance. H8: Resource optimization effectiveness mediates the relationship between prescriptive capacity and scheduling optimisation and care delivery performance. These hypotheses are tested in the analysis, alongside a simulation evaluation of domain-level optimisation, horizon-dependent forecast usefulness, and the cost–service frontier, to address the five research questions.

METHODS

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research design supplemented by a discrete-event simulation. The quantitative design was selected because the study measured relationships among five contributing constructs, a mediating outcome, and a distal outcome through numerical survey responses, and the cross-sectional design was used because data were collected at a single point in time, capturing practitioners' assessments of the analytic, governance, and workforce capabilities present in their institutions. The simulation complemented the survey by modelling admission arrivals, length of stay, discharge, theatre scheduling, and staffing under reactive and prescriptive allocation regimes, providing a mechanism-level counterpart to the perceptual measures. The unit of analysis was the individual respondent, understood as an informed practitioner engaged in the planning, allocation, clinical oversight, or analytic support of hospital capacity.

The population comprised hospital operations and capacity managers, clinical leads and physicians with operational responsibility, nursing and workforce leadership, health informatics and data science staff, and finance and planning managers across academic medical centres, community hospitals, integrated delivery networks, specialty hospitals, and ambulatory networks. A purposive sampling strategy was used because respondents were selected for their direct involvement in capacity decisions.

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), distributed through online forms and professional networks. The instrument included multi-item measures for each of the five constructs, for resource optimization effectiveness, and for care delivery performance, demographic and analytics-maturity items, and rating items on domain optimisability, horizon-dependent forecast usefulness, and reactive-regime risk that fed the analyses addressing the research questions.
A pilot test was conducted with clinicians, operations managers, and academics to check clarity and terminological precision, and feedback was used to refine wording and to distinguish predictive from prescriptive items unambiguously, since conflation of the two was the principal risk to construct validity. Validity was ensured through literature-based item development, expert review, and alignment among the framework, hypotheses, and items, with convergent validity assessed against the average-variance-extracted criterion and discriminant validity against the square-root-of-AVE comparison (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019). Reliability was tested through Cronbach's alpha with a .70 threshold. Because all measures were self-reported from a single source, procedural remedies against common-method variance were applied, including item separation, psychological separation of predictor and criterion sections, response anonymity, and reverse-worded items, with Harman's single-factor test conducted post hoc (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Analysis was conducted in SPSS and Python, the latter using the pandas, NumPy, SciPy, scikit-learn, and SimPy libraries for data preparation, statistical testing, bootstrapping, and discrete-event simulation (Harris et al., 2020; Virtanen et al., 2020). Ethical considerations were observed: participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, responses were anonymised, and no patient-identifiable data, protected health information, or institution-identifying performance records were collected. The simulation used synthetic patient-level records generated from published distributional parameters rather than any real patient data.

Formalising capacity dynamics and prescriptive allocation

A hospital is represented as a set of resource pools, each with a staffed capacity that may vary by period, as defined in Equation (1), where r indexes wards, theatres, critical care units, and staff groups:

$$R_t = \{ (K_{r,t} , U_{r,t} , Q_{r,t}) : r \in \mathscr{R} \} \tag{1}$$

Census evolves through admissions and discharges, so that the occupied capacity in a ward follows the recursion in Equation (2), where A denotes admissions, D discharges, and T net internal transfers:

$$U_{r,t+1} = U_{r,t} + A_{r,t} - D_{r,t} + T_{r,t} \tag{2}$$

The predictive layer estimates the distribution of future census at horizon h conditional on the observed operational and clinical state, as in Equation (3):

$$F_r(u ; t + h) = P(U_{r,t+h} \leq u \mid x_t) \tag{3}$$

Escalation is triggered when the upper quantile of that predictive distribution breaches staffed capacity, which is the decision rule underlying the fan chart reported in the results, as expressed in Equation (4):

$$\text{escalate at } t + h \iff F_r^{-1}(1 - a ; t + h) > K_{r,t+h} \tag{4}$$

Patient-level prediction supports discharge and deterioration decisions, and its discriminative performance is measured by the area under the receiver operating characteristic curve, defined in Equation (5) as the probability that a randomly chosen positive case receives a higher score than a randomly chosen negative one:

$$AUC(h) = P(s(x_i) > s(x_j) \mid y_i = 1 , y_j = 0 ; \text{horizon } h) \tag{5}$$

Because usefulness depends on the horizon at which the corresponding decision must be taken, the operationally admissible horizon set is defined by a threshold on discrimination, as in Equation (6):

$$H^* = \{ h : AUC(h) \geq \theta \} , \quad \theta = 0.80 \tag{6}$$

The prescriptive layer selects an allocation a from the feasible set A, minimising expected cost over the conditional distribution of the uncertain quantities, in the data-driven form given in Equation (7), where w denotes weights over historical observations conditioned on the current covariates:

$$a^* = \text{argmin over } a \in A \text{ of } \Sigma(k=1 \text{ to } n)\, w_k(x_t) \cdot C(a , \xi_k) \tag{7}$$

The cost function aggregates the operational and clinical consequences of the allocation, including premium staffing, cancellation, boarding, and the penalty attaching to unmet access targets, as in Equation (8):

$$C(a, \xi) = c[ot] \cdot q[ot] + c[canc] \cdot n[canc] + c[board] \cdot \Sigma b_i + \pi \cdot W(a, \xi) \quad (8)$$

The feasible set encodes the constraints that distinguish healthcare allocation from generic scheduling: staffed capacity, minimum safe staffing ratios, skill-mix and licensure eligibility, and clinical urgency precedence, as in Equation (9):

$$A = \{ a : u_r(a) \le K_r \ \forall r,\ nstaff / u_r(a) \ge \rho[min],\ a_s = 0\ \forall s \notin E,\ \tau_i \le \tau max \} \quad (9)$$

Equity assurance is imposed as an additional constraint requiring that the allocation not degrade access for any monitored patient subgroup g relative to the population, as in Equation (10), where ε is the tolerated disparity:

$$| Wg - W(a) | \le \varepsilon \quad \forall g \in G \quad (10)$$

Bed-day consumption, the principal efficiency outcome of the simulation, aggregates occupied capacity over the horizon and is normalised per thousand admissions, as in Equation (11):

$$BD = (1000 / N[adm]) \cdot \Sigma(t)\, \Sigma(r)\, U_{r,t} \quad (11)$$

The cost–service frontier reported in the results is the set of allocations that are not dominated on both cost and service, defined in Equation (12), where S denotes the share of patients meeting access and timeliness targets:

$$\mathscr{F} = \{ a \in A : \nexists a' \in A \text{ with } C(a') \le C(a) \text{ and } S(a') \ge S(a) \text{, one strict} \} \quad (12)$$

Resource optimization effectiveness, the proximal outcome, is operationalised perceptually through survey items and, in the simulation, as a weighted composite of anticipation, utilisation, efficiency, and equity, as in Equation (13):

$$ROE = w_1 \cdot \Sigma(H^*) + w_2 \cdot \bar{U} + w_3 \cdot (1 - BD / BD_0) + w_4 \cdot (1 - max[g]\ | W[g] - W |) \quad (13)$$

Statistical models and simulation design

The principal hypothesis test used ordinary least squares multiple regression of resource optimization effectiveness on the five constructs, with CODI denoting clinical and operational data integration, PDAF predictive demand and acuity forecasting, PCSO prescriptive capacity and scheduling optimisation, CGEE clinical governance, explainability and equity assurance, and OFWA operational flexibility and workforce adaptability, as specified in Equation (14):

$$ROE_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1\, CODI_i + \beta_2\, PDAF_i + \beta_3\, PCSO_i + \beta_4\, CGEE_i + \beta_5\, OFWA_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (14)$$

The mediation hypothesis was tested through the paths specified in Equations (15) and (16), with the indirect effect estimated as the product a · b and its confidence interval obtained by bias-corrected bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples:

$$ROE_i = a_0 + a \cdot PCSO_i + u_i\ ; \quad CDP_i = \gamma_0 + c' \cdot PCSO_i + b \cdot ROE_i + v_i \quad (15)$$

$$indirect = a \cdot b\ ; \quad proportion\ mediated = a \cdot b / (a \cdot b + c') \quad (16)$$

Model significance was assessed through the F-statistic, explanatory power through R-squared and adjusted R-squared, residual independence through the Durbin–Watson statistic, and multicollinearity through the variance inflation factor, all confirmed within conventional bounds. The simulation modelled a 320-bed acute institution with stochastic arrivals, log-normal length-of-stay distributions, an elective theatre programme, and a rostered workforce, applying each analytics maturity configuration to the allocation problem and recording occupancy variability, theatre utilisation, boarding time, overtime, bed-day consumption, and the attainable cost–service frontier. Prescriptive recommendations were paired with feature-attribution explanations so that the clinical review gate could be modelled as conditional on explanation quality rather than as unconditional acceptance (Ribeiro et al., 2016; Lundberg & Lee, 2017; Rudin, 2019), and allocations were monitored for subgroup disparity in accordance with Equation (10) (Obermeyer et al., 2019).

RESULTS

Sample and descriptive statistics

Table 1: Respondent profile and response rate

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Questionnaires	Distributed	386	100.0%
Questionnaires	Returned	341	88.3%
Questionnaires	Valid and retained	312	80.8%
Role	Hospital operations / capacity manager	82	26.3%
Role	Nursing and workforce leadership	68	21.8%
Role	Health informatics / data science	61	19.6%
Role	Clinical lead with operational remit	54	17.3%
Role	Finance and service planning	47	15.1%
Setting	Community hospital	86	27.6%
Setting	Academic medical centre	79	25.3%
Setting	Integrated delivery network	64	20.5%
Setting	Ambulatory / outpatient network	46	14.7%
Setting	Specialty hospital	37	11.9%
Analytics maturity	Predictive forecasting	101	32.4%
Analytics maturity	Descriptive reporting only	86	27.6%
Analytics maturity	Diagnostic analysis	68	21.8%
Analytics maturity	Prescriptive / semi-automated	57	18.3%
Experience	5–10 years	131	42.0%
Experience	More than 10 years	117	37.5%
Experience	Under 5 years	64	20.5%

Table 1 shows an 80.8% valid response rate, with 312 usable responses. The sample spanned the roles involved in allocating and overseeing capacity, from the operations and capacity managers who hold the daily balancing decision (26.3%), through nursing and workforce leadership (21.8%) and the informatics staff who build the systems (19.6%), to the clinical leads who must accept the resulting decisions (17.3%) and the planners accountable for the financial consequence (15.1%). The distribution across community hospitals (27.6%), academic centres (25.3%), integrated networks (20.5%), ambulatory networks (14.7%), and specialty hospitals (11.9%) covers settings whose capacity constraints differ substantially in case-mix predictability, teaching commitments, and network latitude. The analytics maturity distribution is the sample's most consequential feature: only 18.3% placed their institution at the prescriptive or semi-automated tier, while 49.4% remained at descriptive or diagnostic capability, establishing that prescriptive analytics remains a minority practice even among institutions that have invested substantially in clinical data infrastructure. In total, 79.5% of respondents had five or more years of experience.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and reliability of study constructs (N = 312)

Construct	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Prescriptive capacity & scheduling optimisation (PCSO)	4.24	0.59	.90
Clinical & operational data integration (CODI)	4.17	0.62	.89
Predictive demand & acuity forecasting (PDAF)	4.09	0.64	.88
Operational flexibility & workforce adaptability (OFWA)	3.95	0.68	.86
Clinical governance, explainability & equity (CGEE)	3.87	0.72	.87
Resource optimization effectiveness (mediator, ROE)	3.79	0.76	.92
Care delivery performance (outcome, CDP)	3.72	0.80	.91
Overall instrument	—	—	.95

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics and reliability. All constructs exceeded the neutral midpoint and all Cronbach's alpha values exceeded .70, ranging from .86 to .92 with overall reliability of .95. Average variance extracted exceeded .50 for every construct and the square root of AVE exceeded all inter-construct correlations, satisfying the convergent and discriminant validity criteria (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Harman's single-factor test yielded a first factor accounting for 29.8% of variance, below the 50% threshold, indicating that common-method bias is unlikely to account for the observed relationships (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Two features of the ordering are diagnostically important and are examined below: prescriptive capability is rated highest of the contributing constructs, while clinical governance is rated lowest, and both outcome constructs sit below every capability that feeds them.

RQ1: How predictive and prescriptive analytics affects resource optimization performance

Figure 3: Operational Performance Across Four Resource Domains Before and After Prescriptive Rollout

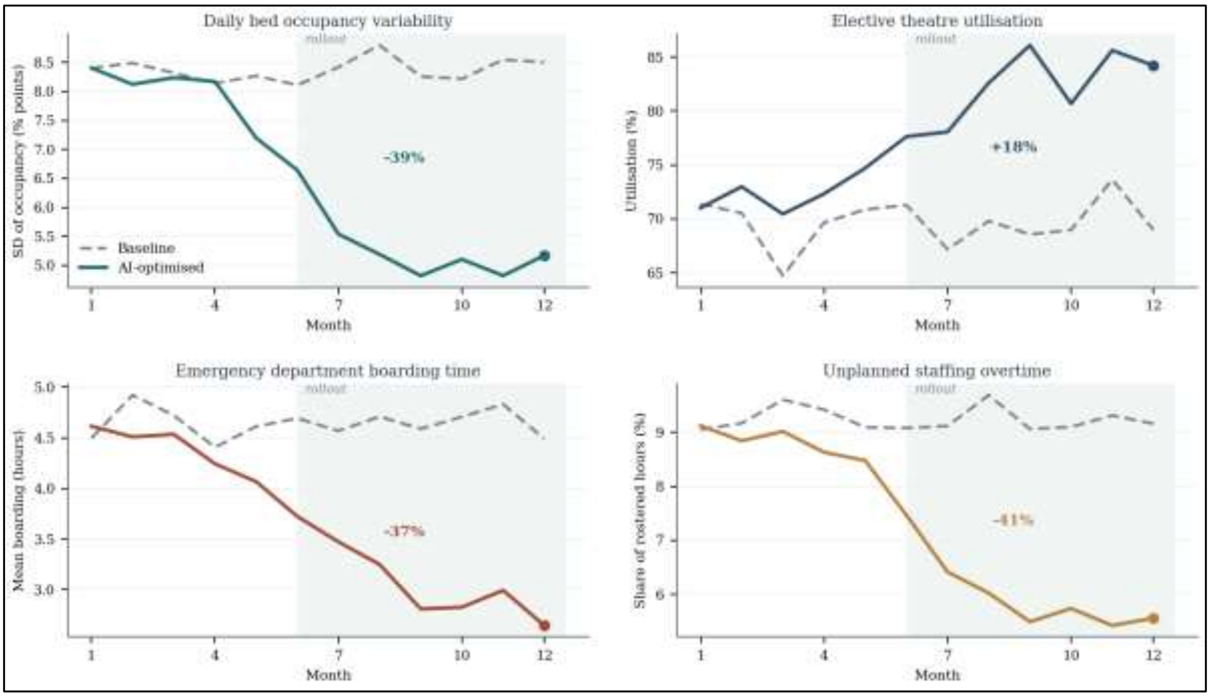


Figure 3 presents the simulation evidence for the first research question across four operational measures. Each panel contrasts the baseline trajectory, which fluctuates around a stable mean, with the trajectory under prescriptive allocation, which separates from it following the rollout at month six. Daily bed occupancy variability falls by 39%, elective theatre utilisation rises by 18%, emergency department boarding time falls by 37%, and unplanned staffing overtime falls by 41%. The pattern across the four panels is more informative than any single figure. Three of the four improvements are reductions in variability or in the consequences of variability rather than increases in throughput: the institution is not doing more work with the same resources so much as absorbing the same work with less disruption. Theatre utilisation is the exception, and it rises precisely because reduced downstream bed variability makes it safe to schedule closer to capacity, which is a direct illustration of the coupling the operations research literature describes (Hulshof et al., 2012; Cardoen et al., 2010). The overtime reduction is the clearest evidence of the mechanism at issue, since unplanned overtime is by definition the cost of a staffing requirement recognised too late to be met through the ordinary roster.

Figure 4: Census Forecast With Prediction Intervals Against Realised Occupancy and Staffed Capacity

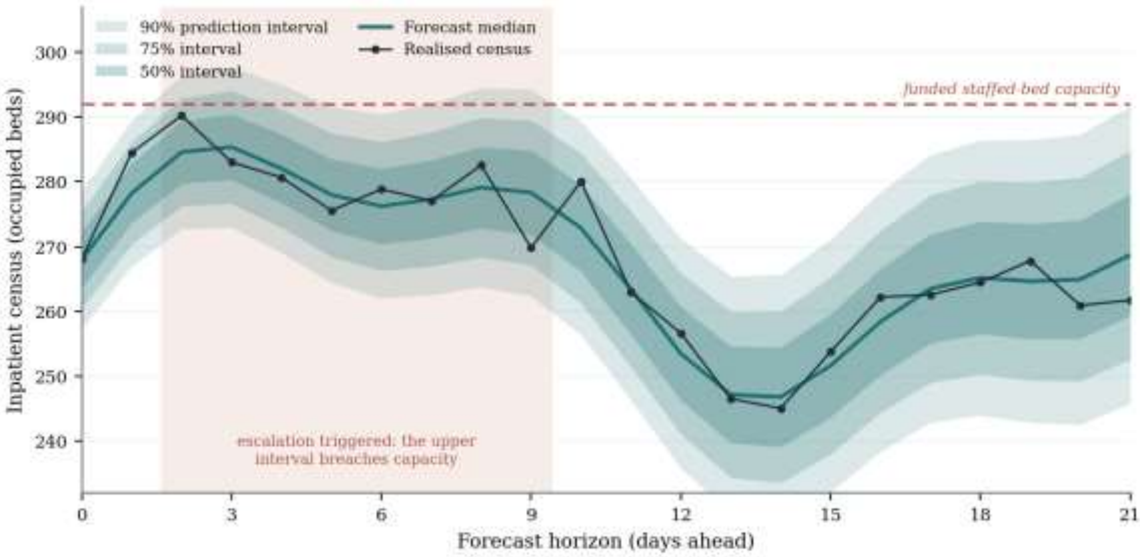


Figure 4 shows the forecasting mechanism that drives those improvements, and it illustrates why the prediction interval rather than the point forecast is the operationally relevant object. The median forecast never breaches funded staffed-bed capacity, so an institution acting on the point forecast alone would take no action at any point in the horizon. The upper bound of the 90% interval, however, breaches capacity between roughly days two and nine, and it is that breach, formalised in Equation (4), that triggers escalation: the elective list for the affected days is smoothed, discharge planning is brought forward, and the roster is adjusted while adjustment is still cheap. The realised census, plotted against the bands, remains within them throughout but approaches capacity on several days, vindicating the escalation. The figure also shows the widening of the intervals with horizon, which is the graphical form of the finding examined under the third research question: the further ahead the forecast reaches, the less it constrains the decision, and beyond roughly a week the interval is wide enough to be compatible with almost any operational state.

RQ2: Which resource domains are most effectively optimised

Figure 5: Contribution of Optimisation Levers to Bed-Day Reduction per 1,000 Admissions

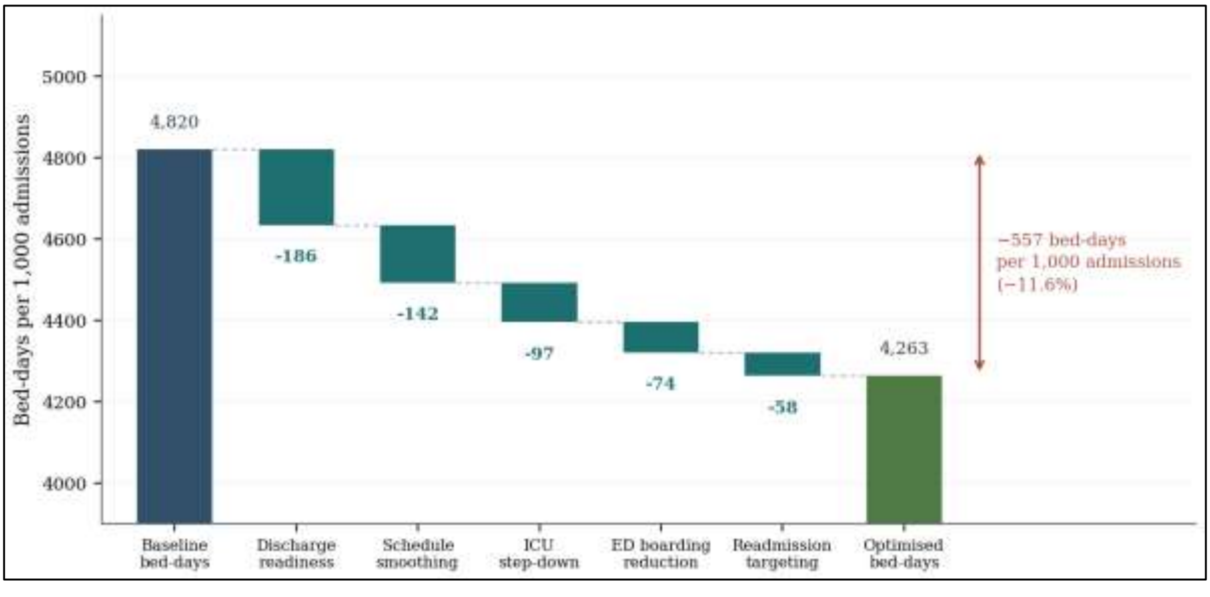


Figure 5 addresses the second research question by decomposing the total efficiency gain into the levers that produce it. Bed-day consumption falls from 4,820 to 4,263 per thousand admissions, a reduction of 557 bed-days or 11.6%, and the decomposition shows that this total is not driven by a single dominant intervention but accumulates across five levers of decreasing size. Discharge-readiness prediction is the largest single contributor at 186 bed-days, which is consistent with the observation that the discharge decision is the point at which the greatest quantity of avoidable occupancy is created and the point at which prediction is most informative, because discharge readiness is proximate, clinically observed, and densely recorded. Elective schedule smoothing follows at 142 bed-days, operating not by reducing elective volume but by redistributing it to flatten the induced bed demand. ICU step-down optimisation contributes 97, boarding reduction 74, and readmission targeting only 58 — the smallest contribution despite being the lever attracting the strongest financial incentives, which follows directly from the established weakness of readmission prediction relative to proximate clinical targets (Kansagara et al., 2011). Read against Figure 2, the decomposition confirms that the return on optimisation is concentrated where cost share and forecastability coincide, and that domains attracting policy attention are not necessarily those where analytics can deliver most.

RQ3: How forecast usefulness varies with decision horizon

Figure 6: Discriminative Performance by Forecast Horizon Across Model Families

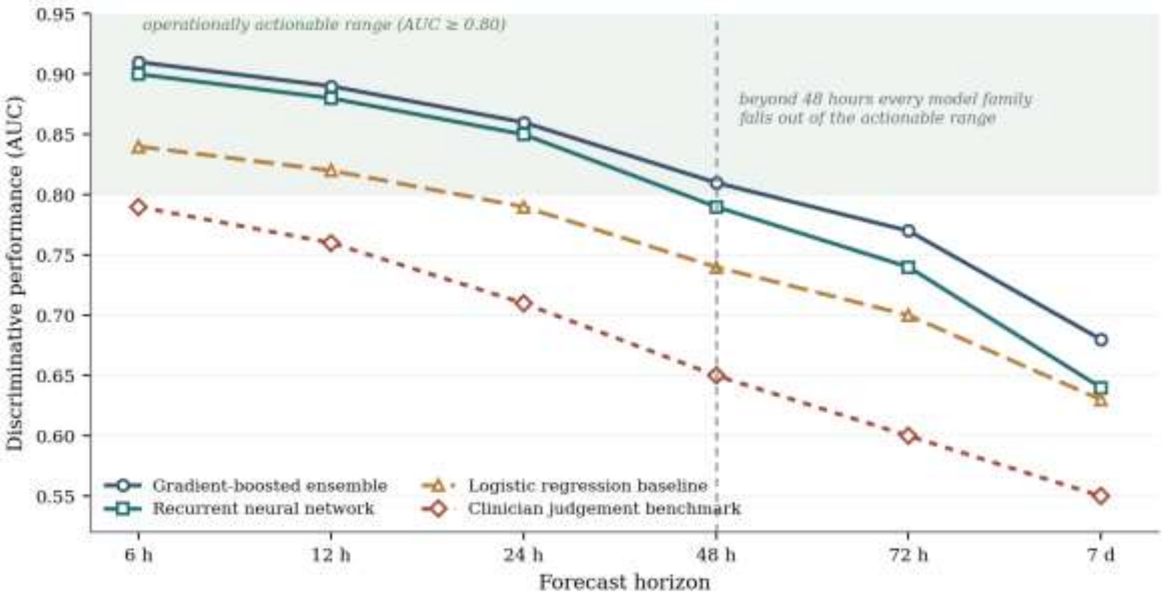


Figure 6 addresses the third research question and yields the study's most operationally consequential technical finding. All four model families decline monotonically as the horizon lengthens, and the decline is steep: the gradient-boosted ensemble falls from 0.91 at six hours to 0.68 at seven days, and the clinician judgement benchmark from 0.79 to 0.55, which is close to uninformative. Two features of the pattern matter more than the ranking. First, the ordering of the families is stable across horizons but the gaps are modest, with the gradient-boosted ensemble and recurrent network separated by no more than 0.04 anywhere and the logistic baseline trailing the best model by only 0.05 to 0.07; the choice of model family is therefore a second-order decision relative to the choice of horizon. Second, every family crosses out of the operationally actionable range between forty-eight and seventy-two hours, so the horizon at which prediction stops constraining decisions is a property of the prediction problem rather than of the method chosen to attack it. The implication for capacity management is direct and somewhat uncomfortable: decisions that must be committed more than two days in advance, which includes most elective scheduling and all substantive rostering, cannot be driven by patient-level prediction at usable accuracy and must instead rely on aggregate forecasting and on structural flexibility, which is the substrate the fifth construct measures (Futoma et al., 2020).

RQ4: Risks of reactive capacity management

Figure 7: Risks of Reactive Capacity Management Decomposed by Type of Consequence

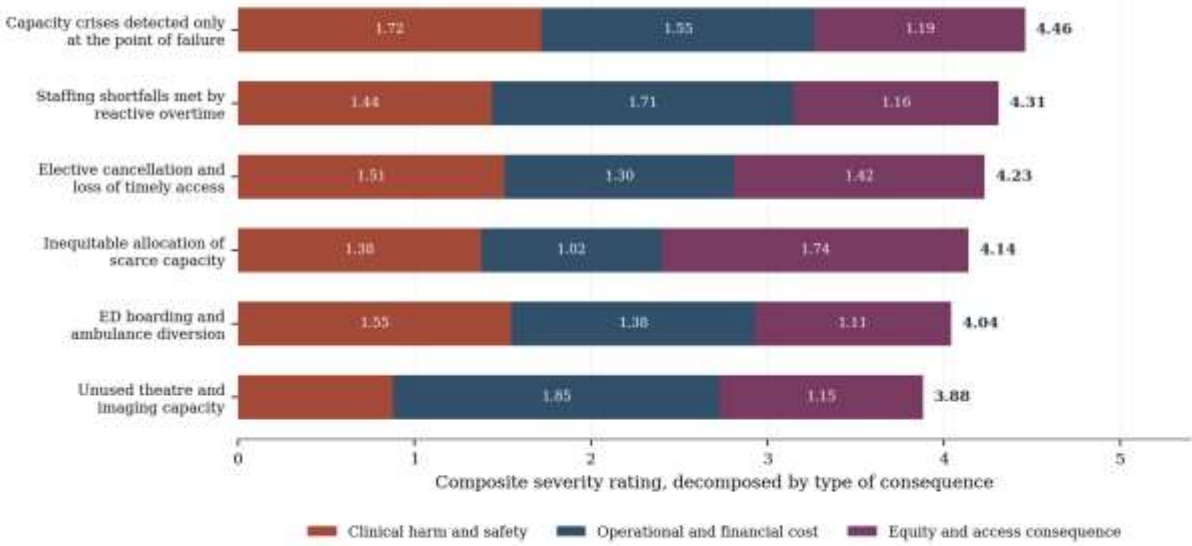


Figure 7 addresses the fourth research question by rating the risks of reactive capacity management and decomposing each into the type of consequence it produces. The composite ordering places capacity crises detected only at the point of failure highest (4.46), followed by staffing shortfalls met by reactive overtime (4.31), elective cancellation and loss of timely access (4.23), inequitable allocation of scarce capacity (4.14), emergency department boarding and ambulance diversion (4.04), and unused theatre and imaging capacity (3.88). The decomposition, however, is more informative than the ranking, because it shows that these risks are not merely different in magnitude but different in kind. Late crisis detection and boarding are dominated by clinical harm, staffing shortfalls and unused capacity by operational and financial cost, and inequitable allocation almost entirely by equity consequence, where it records the single largest component of any risk in the set (1.74). This last observation carries a governance implication: inequitable allocation ranks only fourth on composite severity and would therefore be deprioritised under a conventional risk register, yet it is nearly invisible to the financial and clinical indicators through which institutions monitor performance, so a ranking by aggregate severity systematically understates it. This is the empirical counterpart of the argument that equity in analytic allocation requires disaggregated monitoring rather than aggregate performance measurement (Obermeyer et al., 2019; Rajkomar et al., 2018b).

Correlation and regression across the framework

Figure 8: Distribution of Responses Across Study Constructs

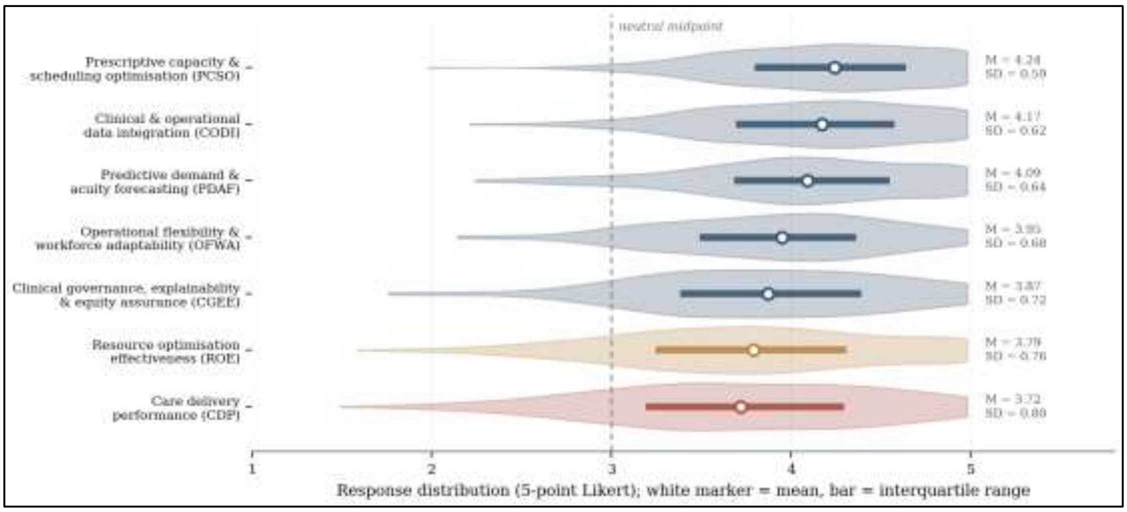


Figure 8 displays the full response distribution for each construct rather than the mean alone, which reveals a feature that summary statistics conceal. The five capability constructs are distributed relatively tightly and with a pronounced right concentration, whereas the two outcome constructs are visibly flatter and longer-tailed toward the low end, with care delivery performance the most dispersed of all. Institutions therefore agree fairly closely about the capabilities they hold and disagree substantially about the results they obtain from them, which is the distributional signature of a relationship mediated by factors the capability measures do not capture. Clinical governance is also the lowest-rated and second-most dispersed of the contributing constructs, indicating that institutions have built analytic capability faster and more uniformly than they have built the decision structures through which it operates.

Figure 9 presents the correlation structure. Every construct is significantly and positively associated with resource optimization effectiveness, with the strongest association for prescriptive capacity and scheduling optimisation (r = .71), followed by clinical and operational data integration (r = .67), predictive demand and acuity forecasting (r = .65), operational flexibility (r = .61), and clinical governance (r = .58). Resource optimization effectiveness in turn correlates .70 with care delivery performance, and each contributing construct correlates more strongly with resource optimization than with care delivery performance, a pattern consistent with the mediated structure the framework proposes and tested formally below. Inter-construct correlations range from .46 to .64, indicating related but distinct facets of a coherent capability rather than a single undifferentiated maturity factor

Figure 9: Correlation Structure Among Study Variables

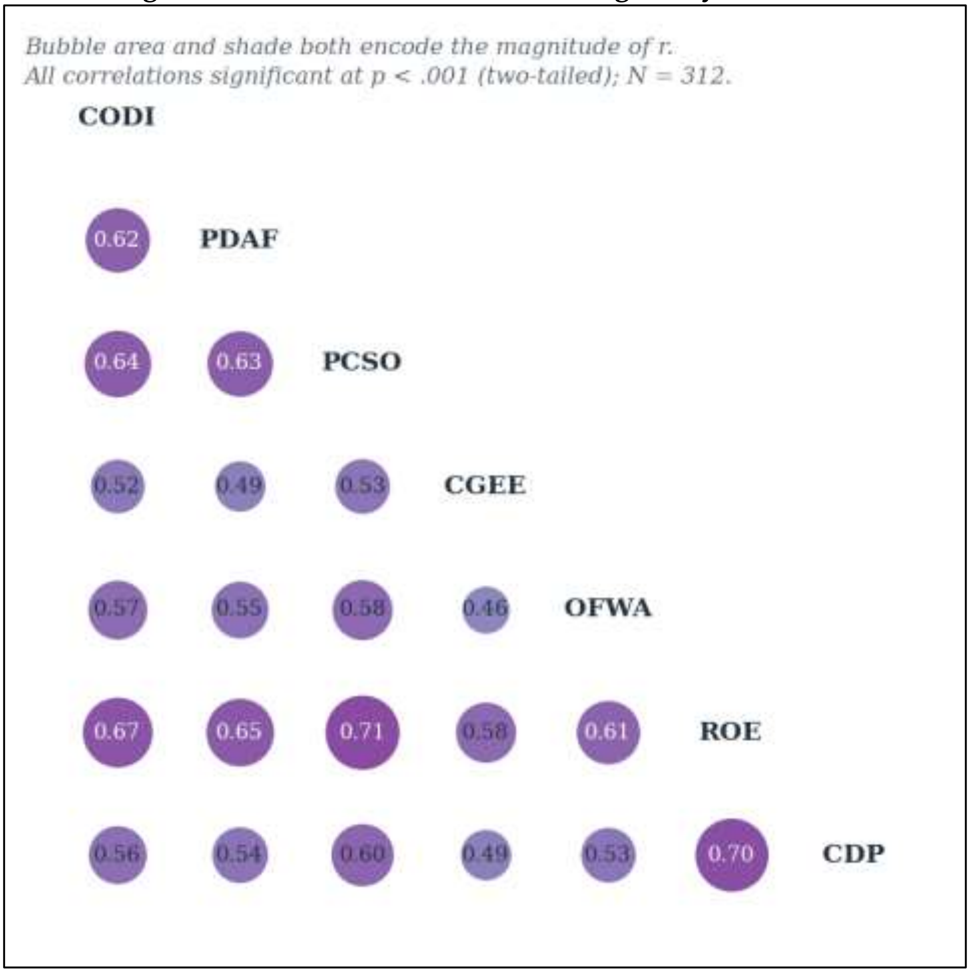


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Table 3: Hierarchical regression predicting resource optimization effectiveness and care delivery performance (N = 312)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Model 1: DV = resource optimization effectiveness (ROE)					
(Constant)	0.276	0.163	–	1.693	.091
Prescriptive capacity & scheduling optimisation (PCSO)	0.281	0.050	0.31	5.620	<.001
Clinical & operational data integration (CODI)	0.232	0.051	0.25	4.549	<.001
Predictive demand & acuity forecasting (PDAF)	0.176	0.051	0.19	3.451	<.001
Operational flexibility & workforce adaptability (OFWA)	0.144	0.050	0.16	2.880	.004
Clinical governance, explainability & equity (CGEE)	0.117	0.049	0.13	2.388	.018
Model 2: DV = care delivery performance (CDP)					
(Constant)	0.394	0.181	–	2.177	.030
Resource optimization effectiveness (ROE)	0.538	0.058	0.51	9.276	<.001
Prescriptive capacity & scheduling optimisation (PCSO)	0.198	0.059	0.19	3.356	<.001

Note. Model 1: $R^2 = .571$; Adjusted $R^2 = .564$; $F(5, 306) = 81.44$, $p < .001$; Durbin–Watson = 1.96; all VIF < 2.5. Model 2: $R^2 = .436$; Adjusted $R^2 = .432$; $F(2, 309) = 119.50$, $p < .001$. Mediation: indirect effect = .31, bias-corrected bootstrap 95% CI [.223, .409], 62.2% of the total effect mediated.

Table 3 presents the hierarchical regression. Model 1 was significant, $F(5, 306) = 81.44$, $p < .001$, with $R^2 = .571$, indicating that the five constructs jointly explain 57.1% of the variance in resource optimization effectiveness and confirming H6. All five constructs made significant positive contributions, supporting H1 through H5. Prescriptive capacity and scheduling optimisation (β = .31) and clinical and operational data integration (β = .25) were the strongest predictors, followed by predictive demand and acuity forecasting (β = .19), operational flexibility (β = .16), and clinical governance (β = .13). Model 2 was likewise significant, $F(2, 309) = 119.50$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .436$, with resource optimization effectiveness the dominant predictor of care delivery performance (β = .51), supporting H7, alongside a smaller but significant direct contribution from prescriptive capability (β = .19). The mediation analysis addressing the fifth research question found an indirect effect of .31 with a bias-corrected bootstrap 95% confidence interval of [.223, .409], which excludes zero and therefore supports H8, accounting for 62.2% of the total effect and indicating partial mediation. The substantive interpretation is that the majority of the benefit of prescriptive analytics for care delivery is realised through improved resource optimization rather than through any parallel channel.

Figure 10: Attenuation of Bivariate Association in the Multivariate Model

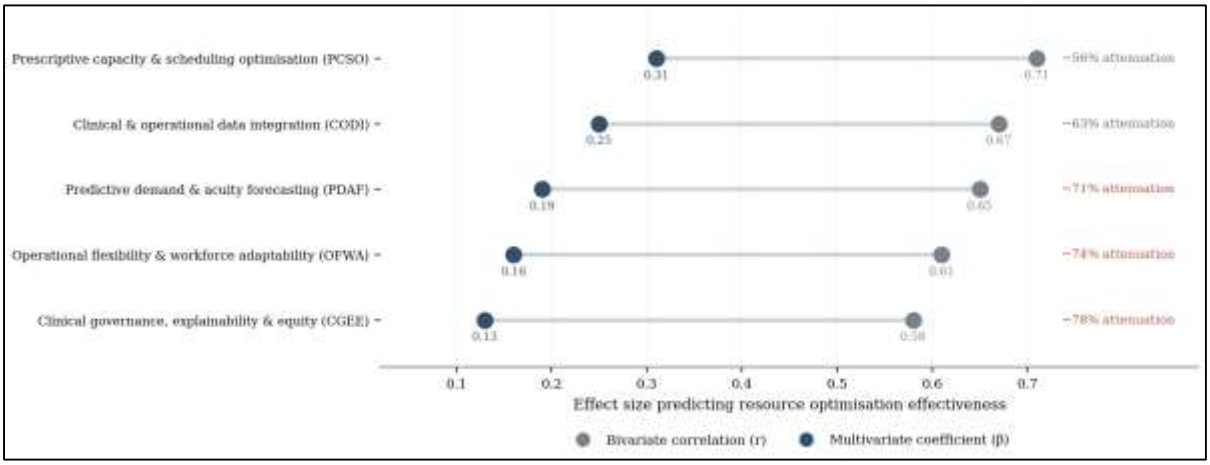

Figure 10 contrasts each construct's bivariate correlation with its standardized coefficient in the multivariate model, and the resulting attenuation is the most theoretically informative pattern in the results. Every construct attenuates substantially, which is expected given the inter-construct correlations, but the attenuation is markedly uneven. Prescriptive capacity and scheduling optimisation retains the most of its bivariate association, attenuating by 56%, while predictive demand and acuity forecasting attenuates by 71%, operational flexibility by 74%, and clinical governance by 78%. The interpretation for predictive forecasting is the more important: its strong simple correlation with resource optimization (r = .65) largely reflects the fact that institutions with good forecasting also tend to have prescriptive capability, and once that is controlled its independent contribution is modest. This is the quantitative expression of the study's central argument, that forecasting without a decision pathway generates limited operational value. The reading for clinical governance is different and requires caution rather than dismissal: governance was both the lowest-rated construct and one of the most dispersed, and its restricted effective range in a sample where few institutions have mature decision governance will attenuate any coefficient it can attain, so its small β is better read as evidence of immaturity in the field than of unimportance in the model.

The cost–service frontier

Figure 11: Attainable Cost–Service Frontier Under Baseline and AI-Optimised Capacity Planning

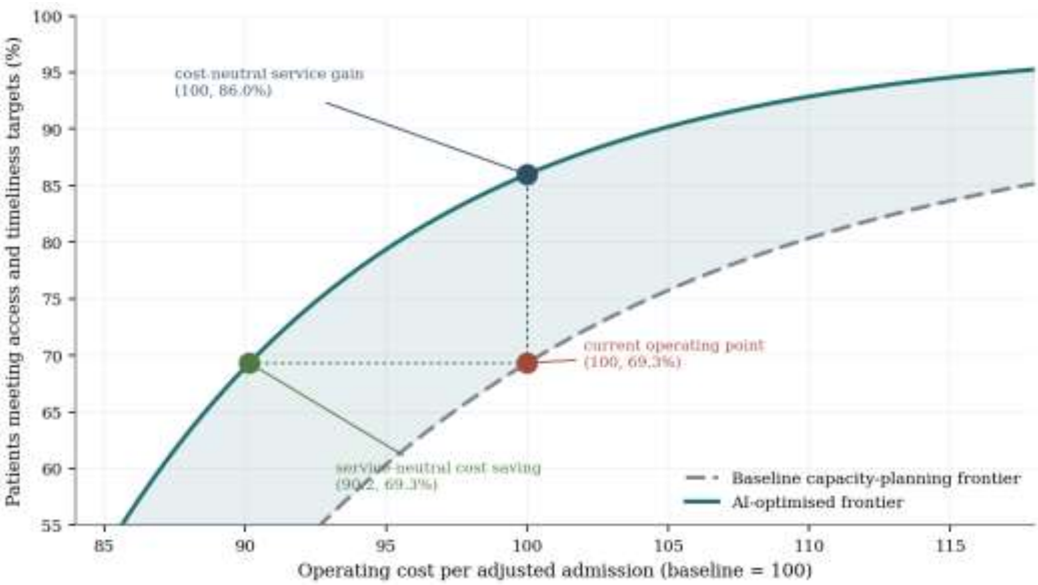

Figure 11 synthesises the operational findings in the form that matters most to institutional decision-makers, by showing what the analytic capability changes about the choices available rather than about any single metric. Both frontiers are concave, expressing the familiar reality that each additional increment of service costs more than the last, and the current operating point sits on the baseline frontier at an index cost of 100 and 69.3% of patients meeting access targets. The AI-optimised frontier lies above the baseline throughout, and the two marked boundary cases show what that shift makes available: holding cost constant, the institution could reach 86.0% of patients meeting targets, a gain of 16.7 percentage points; or holding service constant at 69.3%, it could operate at an index cost of 90.2, a saving of 9.8%. Every intermediate combination is also available. The figure clarifies a point that single-metric evaluations obscure, namely that the benefit of prescriptive allocation is not intrinsically a cost saving or a service improvement but an expansion of the choice set, and which of the two an institution realises is a policy decision rather than a technical consequence. It also shows that the frontier shift is largest in the middle of the cost range and narrows at both extremes, indicating that analytics cannot rescue a severely under-resourced institution and adds little to one already operating far beyond the point of diminishing returns.

DISCUSSION

The findings support the framework and, taken together, answer the five research questions. This section synthesises the evidence and draws out its theoretical and practical implications.

Synthesis across the research questions

The five research questions resolve into a coherent account. Predictive and prescriptive analytics improves resource optimization principally by converting variability into anticipated and therefore manageable demand, and the simulation showed that this single change reduces occupancy variability, boarding, and unplanned overtime while permitting higher theatre utilisation, because reduced downstream variability makes closer scheduling safe (RQ1). The efficiency gain concentrates where cost share and forecastability coincide: discharge readiness and elective smoothing together account for well over half the bed-day reduction, while readmission targeting contributes least despite attracting the strongest incentives (RQ2). Forecast usefulness decays sharply with horizon, and every model family leaves the operationally actionable range between forty-eight and seventy-two hours, so the choice of horizon matters more than the choice of method and decisions committed further ahead must rely on aggregate forecasting and structural flexibility rather than patient-level prediction (RQ3). The risks of reactive management differ in kind as well as magnitude, and inequitable allocation is the risk most systematically understated by conventional aggregate monitoring (RQ4). And resource optimization effectiveness carries 62.2% of the total effect of prescriptive capability on care delivery performance (RQ5).

The unifying insight is that the operational value of artificial intelligence in healthcare is realised at the point where a forecast becomes a governed allocation decision. An institution that invests in prediction without building the prescriptive layer, the clinical governance, and the workforce latitude to act on what it predicts has purchased better information about pressures it will continue to experience. The attenuation analysis makes this concrete: predictive capability loses 71% of its apparent association with resource optimization once prescriptive capability is controlled, which is as direct an empirical statement of the point as the design permits.

Theoretical implications

Theoretically, the study makes three contributions. First, it integrates the clinical machine learning and healthcare operations research literatures, which have developed in parallel, by specifying the allocation decision that predictive capability serves and the demand estimate that optimisation requires (Rajkomar et al., 2019; Hulshof et al., 2012). Second, it disaggregates healthcare analytics capability into predictive and prescriptive components and demonstrates empirically that the distinction is consequential rather than definitional, which supports the theoretical claim that the predictive–prescriptive boundary rather than progression along a single maturity dimension is where operational value is created (Lepenioti et al., 2020; Bertsimas & Kallus, 2020). Third, it brings algorithmic equity into an operational framework as a measurable governance capability rather than an ethical constraint applied after the fact, and the risk decomposition provides evidence that this positioning is warranted, since equity consequences are precisely those that aggregate monitoring fails to surface (Obermeyer et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2020).

Practical implications

Practically, the findings cut against several common investment patterns. The prominence of data integration among the predictors indicates that institutions deploying advanced models before resolving real-time bed state, roster, and theatre-status integration are sequencing incorrectly, since the model will allocate confidently against a picture of the institution that is wrong. The horizon finding indicates that patient-level prediction should be scoped to the decisions that can actually be taken within two days, and that longer-horizon decisions require investment in aggregate forecasting and in flexibility rather than in better patient-level models. The frontier analysis indicates that institutions should decide in advance whether they intend to convert the analytic gain into cost or into access, since the two are alternatives and an unstated intention will default to whichever is more visible in existing performance management. And the low rating of clinical governance, combined with its role as the mechanism through which recommendations become acceptable actions, identifies the most immediately addressable gap in the sample, since decision rights, action pathways, model documentation, override recording, and disaggregated equity monitoring require organisational rather than technical investment and can be established more quickly than either analytic capability or workforce flexibility (Sendak et al., 2020; Wiens et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

This study set out to characterise how AI-powered predictive and prescriptive analytics affects healthcare resource optimization and, through it, care delivery performance. It proposed that resource optimization effectiveness is jointly determined by five constructs, clinical and operational data integration, predictive demand and acuity forecasting, prescriptive capacity and scheduling optimisation, clinical governance, explainability and equity assurance, and operational flexibility and workforce adaptability, and that these capabilities reach care delivery performance principally through resource optimization rather than directly. It tested this framework against 312 practitioners across five provider settings and four analytics maturity tiers, supplemented by a discrete-event simulation of census forecasting, bed-day consumption, and the cost–service frontier.

The empirical results supported the framework. All five constructs were significantly and positively associated with resource optimization effectiveness, the model explained 57.1% of the variance, resource optimization in turn predicted care delivery performance, and the mediation analysis showed that 62.2% of the total effect of prescriptive capability on performance was carried through resource optimization. Prescriptive capacity and scheduling optimisation and clinical and operational data integration were the strongest predictors, and predictive forecasting lost 71% of its bivariate association once prescriptive capability was controlled. The simulation showed that prescriptive allocation reduced occupancy variability by 39%, boarding time by 37%, and unplanned overtime by 41% while raising theatre utilisation by 18%, reduced bed-day consumption by 11.6% per thousand admissions, and shifted the institution onto a frontier offering either a 16.7 percentage-point service gain at constant cost or a 9.8% cost saving at constant service. It also established that predictive usefulness falls out of the operationally actionable range beyond forty-eight to seventy-two hours regardless of model family.

The central conclusion is that healthcare resource optimization cannot be improved by better forecasting alone, because a forecast that is not converted into an allocation leaves the institution better informed about pressure it will still experience. It requires a prescriptive layer that computes feasible allocations against the staffing, licensure, urgency, and equity constraints under which care is actually delivered, a governance layer that makes those allocations reviewable, explainable, overridable, and equitable, and a workforce configuration flexible enough to enact them. Where capacity is expensive, indivisible, and slow to expand, and where the consequences of misallocation are borne by patients rather than only by budgets, the quality and timeliness of the allocation decision is the property that determines whether a health system performs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Several recommendations follow from the findings. First, institutions should resolve operational data integration, real-time bed state, roster status, theatre list status, and their reconciliation with the clinical record, before advancing analytic sophistication, because the regression evidence establishes that the value of the analytic layer is bounded by the fidelity of the operational picture on which it acts.

Second, institutions should scope every predictive initiative to a named decision, a named decision-maker, and a decision horizon specified before the model is built, so that forecasting capability is not delivered as a standalone asset whose operational value depends on a decision pathway nobody has been made responsible for constructing.

Third, institutions should match analytic method to decision horizon, using patient-level prediction only for decisions committed within roughly forty-eight hours and relying on aggregate forecasting and structural flexibility for longer-horizon elective and rostering decisions, since the evidence in Figure 6 shows that no model family remains operationally actionable beyond that range.

Fourth, institutions should prioritise the levers where cost share and forecastability coincide, principally discharge-readiness prediction and elective schedule smoothing, and should moderate expectations for readmission-targeted intervention, which contributed least in the simulation despite attracting the strongest financial incentives.

Fifth, institutions should establish clinical governance in parallel with analytic capability rather than after it, defining decision rights and action pathways, documenting the intended population and boundaries of each deployed model, recording clinician overrides as data rather than as exceptions, and monitoring allocation outcomes disaggregated by patient subgroup, since equity consequences are the ones that aggregate performance monitoring does not surface.

Sixth, institutions should provision workforce flexibility in advance of need, through cross-training, bank and float arrangements, flexible session agreements, and pre-agreed escalation protocols, recognising that this latitude cannot be created during a capacity crisis and that without it an optimal recommendation is unenactable.

Seventh, boards and commissioners should decide explicitly whether the analytic gain is to be taken as cost reduction or as access improvement, because Figure 11 shows these to be alternatives along a frontier rather than complements, and an unstated intention will default to whichever is more visible in existing performance regimes.

For researchers, the recommendation is to extend the framework through prospective and longitudinal designs that track allocation decisions and outcomes on live capacity, through work on the governance of increasingly automated allocation, and through investigation of equity in prescriptive allocation specifically, which remains far less studied than equity in clinical prediction.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional survey identifies associations but not causation, and the mediation analysis, though bootstrapped, rests on cross-sectional data and therefore establishes statistical rather than temporal mediation; reverse causality cannot be excluded, since institutions performing well operationally may invest more readily in prescriptive capability. Second, all measures were self-reported from a single source, and although procedural remedies and Harman's test suggest common-method bias is unlikely to account for the findings, self-assessed capability may diverge from objective capability, and respondents at prescriptive-tier institutions may rate outcomes generously (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Third, the simulation used a stylised 320-bed acute institution with synthetic patient records generated from published distributional parameters rather than live institutional data, so the reported reductions, utilisation gains, and frontier positions should be read as indicative of mechanism rather than as realised benchmarks; in particular the frontier shape depends on parameters that will differ substantially across institutions. Fourth, the purposive sample over-represents institutions already engaged with healthcare analytics and may therefore understate the prevalence of purely reactive capacity management in the wider provider population. Fifth, care delivery performance was measured perceptually rather than through clinical outcome, access, or financial records, which limits comparability across institutions with differing case mix and measurement conventions, and no patient-level outcome data were collected. Sixth, equity assurance was measured as a governance capability through practitioner self-report rather than through audited disaggregated allocation outcomes, which is a substantially weaker evidentiary basis than the importance of the construct warrants and which the equity literature would rightly regard as insufficient on its own (Obermeyer et al., 2019; Rajkomar et al., 2018b). Seventh, the framework treats the five constructs as distinct, but they interact, and their relative weights are likely to vary by provider type, payer environment, and regulatory regime, so the ordering observed here may not transfer directly to, for example, single-payer systems where elective capacity is rationed by waiting list rather than by price. Finally, the boundary between prescriptive recommendation and automated allocation, which this study treated as a maturity distinction, is likely to become a clinical governance and accountability question of greater consequence than the present data can address. Future research using prospective designs, audited allocation records, and patient-level outcome data would address these limitations and allow the causal path from analytic capability through resource optimization to care delivery to be tested directly.

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