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AL-ENABLED COMPUTATIONAL STRATEGIES IN HERBAL DRUG DISCOVERY: MOLECULAR DOCKING, NETWORK PHARMACOLOGY, AND PREDICTIVE MODELING

Harshini R L [1], Guna Kulothungan [2], T. M. Vijayalakshmi [3*]
[1] Department of Medical Biochemistry Dr. Almpgibms University of Madras Taramani Campus Chennai, India
[2] Department of Biochemistry, Saveetha Medical College and Hospital, Saveetha University, SIMATS, Thandalam, Chennai, India
[3] Department of Medical Biochemistry, Dr. ALM Post Graduate Institute of Basic Medical Sciences, University of Madras, Taramani Campus, Chennai, India

ABSTRACT

The AI technology causes a big change that affects all the old ways of making herbal medicine. The evaluation study employs three scientific methodologies: molecular docking, network pharmacology, and predictive modeling, to ascertain the application of AI technology in scientific research. AI can fix structural gap problems thanks to the deep learning as a whole system and AlphaFold technology. This technology lets users look at large sets of phytochemical substance data. Systems that target multiple pathways along with show how herbal mixtures interact can help researchers find new drugs. Companies are changing ADMET research with AI-based prediction modeling because this method lets them find possible toxicity and metabolic syndrome. stability issues early in the product development process. The AI technologies link modern precision medicine methods with older ethnopharmacology methods by fixing problems with data standardization and "black-box" evaluation. The two groups work together to study the therapeutic uses of botanical materials, which helps them come up with new multi-component solutions for complicated health problems more quickly.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Graph Neural Networks, ADMET, Ethnopharmacology etc

INTRODUCTION: THE EVOLUTION OF HERBAL DRUG DISCOVERY

THE CHALLENGE OF PHYTOCHEMICAL COMPLEXITY

Finding herbal medicines is very hard because plants possess chemical compounds that can be very different from with one another and have complicated structural patterns. The process of finding new synthetic drugs begins with one pure compound the fact that is used as the main research material. The source Yang et al. (2022) indicates that "multicomponent" systems have been utilized to find herbal medicine. Depending on the soil quality, the time of year, and the extraction methods, a single plant extract can have hundreds of secondary metabolites, including alkaloids, flavonoids, terpenoids, alongside polyphenols. The secondary metabolites look different. The pharmaceutical industry found a way to solve these problems by means of ongoing research, through which they designated as the "Reductionist Approach." The procedure here of extraction should always keep all of the herb's chemical parts mostly intact because this particular method shields its supposed ability to keep harmful substances from getting into the body.

*Corresponding Author:
Email address: Harshini R L (drshrivastava2020@gmail.com)
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BEYOND THE "ONE-GENE, ONE-DRUG" DISTRIBUTION MODEL

The lock and key system helped scientists learn how drugs could be used to treat diseases for the first time. The model's goal is here to make a monoclonal molecule that will only bind to its biological target in a particular way. Research on type 2 diabetes, neurodegeneration, as well as in cancer has shown that the one-target treatment method does not work for overall complex process that involve more than one gene Han et al. (2023). Natural medicines have effects on many systems in the body, which can lead to many possible side effects. This is because the remedies are made with plant-based ingredients. The transition from "one-target, one-drug" regarding "multi-target, multi-component" systems signify a significant progression in contemporary drug discovery methodologies. The program links old-fashioned medical knowledge with the new field of systems biology.

HOW IMPORTANT AI IS IN FILLING THE GAP

To switch to a multi-target design approach, more computer work needs to be done. Standard lab methods make it hard to draw by hand how thousands of different human proteins or hundreds of phytochemicals interact with each other. In this case, AI (artificial intelligence) is a very important link. Researchers use machine instruction and high-throughput processing data to make digital models of how systems interact in complicated ways. AI lets us do scientific research that uses data we already have to guess what will happen in the future. Synergy looks at how different chemicals work together to make full signaling pathways that involve more than one receptor. This helps us understand how different medicinal recipes work together. In the 21st century, artificial intelligence has completely changed how we test and control herbal medicines. The process is more efficient because it speeds things up and makes them work better.

MOLECULAR DOCKING IN THE AI ERA
THE PROGRESSION OF COMPUTATIONAL BINDING SITE PREDICTION

Since it was openly at first employed in the field of work of this nature docking based molecules have been very important here for making structure-based drugs for further process Bioengineered et al. (2025). This computer program shows academics how the two operate together. The system sets important rules for using plants as medicine because it demonstrates the manner in plant products can help people stay healthy. There have been a lot of problems with traditional docking methods, which are also known as "classical" docking. There are other factual problems: protein-based models that are too rigid, researchers who have to spend too much time & money in processing complete phytochemical databases, resulted in the "scoring function" problem, which eventually happens when mathematical process of binding energy calculations don't match real affinity test results here. These exact parts have changed completely since the "AI Era" in this nature. Docking has overly changed from a static method structure that create a wrong prediction to a dynamic system that finds new information.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND HIGH-THROUGHPUT VIRTUAL SCREENING (HTVS) SPEEDING UP

Artificial intelligence has changed the field of molecular docking in a big way by creating High-Throughput Virtual Screening (HTVS) technology. There are a lot of active ingredients in herbal medicine in this nature. The Traditional Chinese Medicine Systems Pharmacology (TCMSP) database and the COCONUT database comprise over 10,000 phytochemical compounds. Based to Gu et al. (2024), it takes weeks of computer time to assign these parts to disease-related proteins using docking according to classical physics for further process. The AI-powered HTVS device uses its ML framework, showing Support Vector Machines along with Random Forests, to do "pre-screening" procedures. Here one-use existing docking data to teach our models how to find small structural differences that set "binders" apart from "non-binders." AI's fast filtering system can find 90% of inactive pollutants in just a few seconds. A docking simulation only checks the most popular options because it takes up too many computing resources. This tiered method has cut the time it takes to find herbal lead chemicals from years to weeks. This process helps researchers quickly find natural medicines that work against Mpro protease in viral infections and multiple kinases in cancer.

ADDING ALPHAFOLD: EXPANDING THE RANGE OF TARGETS

Experts had trouble with docking assessments because they had to figure out what "structural gap" really meant.To fully dock, it's necessary a complete three-dimensional view of the target protein that shows all of its parts. X-ray crystallography or cryo-electron imaging are considers as the main ways that scientists do their research. Scientists here always thought that these types of protein structures couldn't be used to make natural treatments for diseases as it is as mentioned Akermi et al. (2024). The current and modern database lets Google DeepMind's AlphaFold AI algorithm make particular three-dimensional renderings of all known proteins remains. Phytochemicals based interact with different types of proteins here allowing almost all scientists to detail study that were previously unavailable "dark" proteins. This discovery lets them make new herbal medicines. Scientists found plant-based chemicals in nature that can change certain transcription factors and G-protein coupled receptors (GPCRs), which makes crystallization harder. Researchers can now do in silico tests on these hard-to-reach targets thanks to AlphaFold-predicted structures. Before, this was thought to be impossible. The study employs AI-driven protein folding and docking to analyze the herbal components of botanical products, facilitating an understanding of their fundamental operational mechanisms.

DEEP LEARNING AND THE CHANGE OF SCORING FUNCTIONS

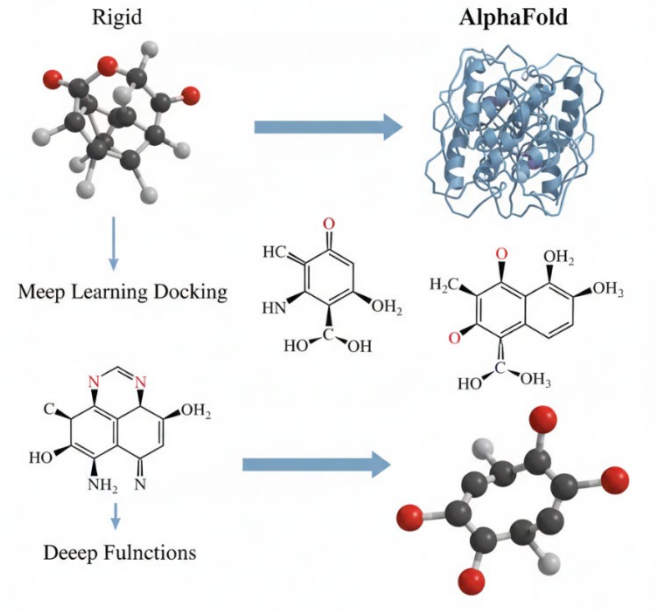
The scoring system shows how well they always stick together (Delta G) here for better output process to use force fields & real-world data, but they don't always take into account water molecules or quantum mechanical interactions that happen in the binding pocket Rodríguez et al. (2024). Artificial intelligence that looks at protein-ligand complex data made "Deep Learning Scoring Functions" (DLSFs). The information is shown in two different ways, depending on which neural network model you choose. Computers use PDBbind databases to learn about complicated molecular recognition patterns that equations made by people can't explain. In herbal research, various compounds, including large polyphenols and versatile terpenoids, frequently exhibit distinct binding interactions, and DLSFs demonstrate a significantly superior correlation with experimental IC_{50} values. Researchers can find real positive results better with the AI scoring system they use. The computer analysis found "hits" that are now being tested in the lab. These hits have a high chance of causing real biological activity.

MACHINE LEARNING FOR INDUCED FIT AND PROTEIN FLEXIBILITY

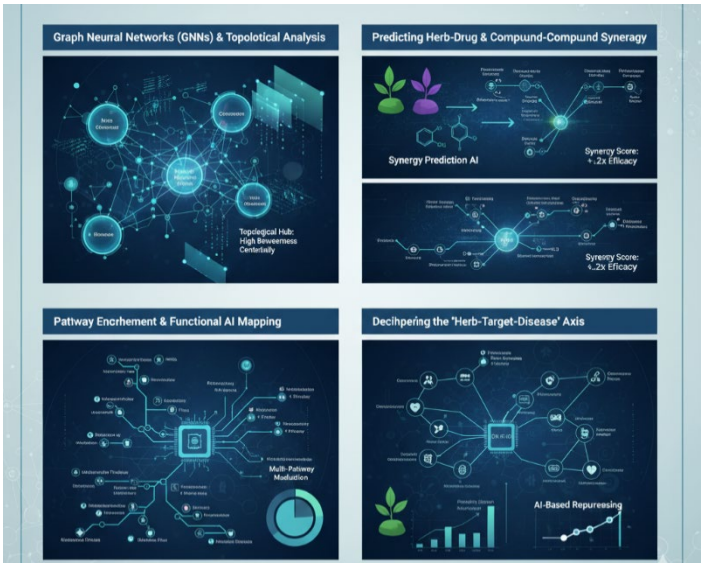
The "Rigid receptor" issues is making it impossible for docking technologies to work right now. The bond between the protein and the herbal ligand lets things move and change shape. The general consensus is that people need to change their clothes in this situation. The method does not take into account how important "induced fit" is Da et al. (2024). Phytochemicals show a pattern of receptor attraction that is similar to the original shape of organic material molecules. Herbal components need special care during the production process because they have complicated multi-ring structures and can switch between different states. Artificial intelligence is what makes it possible for "neural networks" to run molecular dynamics (MD) models through AI-powered systems. The device lets users see the ratios of protein-ligand groups over time. The MD system works better because it uses less processing power.

LINKING THE ATOMIC AND SYSTEMS LEVELS

In herbal research, docking with artificial intelligence is more than just finding one solution that works as a key to open a certain system. The research seeks to delineate all elements of the plant's binding profile, which constitutes the comprehensive inventory of its chemical constituents. Researchers can now use inverse docking technology, which was created by artificial intelligence, to find new biological properties by looking at how one phytochemical interacts with all human proteins Mc and O (2024). The main idea behind herbal treatments is that they can treat more than one medical problem at the same time. Artificial intelligence uses structural evidence to show how a certain flavonoid interacts with an inflammatory enzyme and a metabolic regulator. This shows how traditional medicine can help with many health problems. Researchers can turn old herbal remedies into new medicines that the FDA approves thanks to atomic-level information from artificial intelligence technology.



NETWORK PHARMACOLOGY AND AI SYNERGY: DECODING COMPLEXITY



THE PARADIGM SHIFT FROM LINEAR TO NETWORK-BASED DISCOVERY

The drug development process here has undergone a fundamental and allout change because researchers now use a "network-target, multicomponent" model instead of the "one target, system herein. The traditional method of plant extract discovery faced difficulties because the extract contained more than 100 different metabolites. The field of systems biology views this complexity as a positive development according to Ellouze et al. (2024). Network pharmacology provides a detailed framework which allows researchers to study how medicinal herbs interact with diseases and their biological targets. The discipline develops predictive modeling through AI which enables users to create interactive and changing maps. Artificial intelligence methods based on deep learning and graph theory explain the concealed reasoning that governs herbal medicine practices. They show that multiple minor components can produce a therapeutic effect which exceeds their combined value.

TOPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS AND GRAPH NEURAL NETWORKS (GNNS)

The main way that AI has helped network pharmacology research is by using Graph Neural Networks for scientific analysis. In this instance, mathematical graphs illustrate biological systems. Nodes represent herbs, chemicals, proteins, or diseases, while edges illustrate their interconnections. It's hard to work with the networks given that their non-linear, high-dimensional characteristics are too much for regular statistical methods to handle. The node topological representational education function of GNNs is very

good at figuring out how some nodes keep their network links Spanakis et al. (2025). The GNN method permits scientists find "bottleneck" proteins the fact that phytochemicals may hit to start a number of disease pathways. This helps herbalists find molecules that are "hubs." AI shows that a small alkaloid component has the most important "betweenness centrality," thus explaining why this herb works in clinical settings.

PREDICTING THE SYNERGY BETWEEN HERBS AND DRUGS AND BETWEEN COMPOUNDS

Synergy is the idea that two or more substances can work together to make a bigger difference than they would on their own. Researchers can here easily utilize deep learning architectures structure, such as Autoencoders & Siamese Networks, to forecast the impact of various herbal constituents on the NF-kappa signaling pathway that governs the inflammatory response Bi et al. (2025). To study the traditional multi-herb combinations used in Chinese medicine and Ayurveda, you need to know how to use the Fangji and Kashayams systems. AI algorithms mimic herb combinations to find out which ones work best together and which ones should be avoided. The traditional system of pharmaceutical knowledge gets a mathematical basis, and herbal medicines reach their best form, which leads to better results and fewer health risks.

PATHWAY ENRICHMENT AND FUNCTIONAL AI MAPPING

Combining artificial intelligence with network pharmacology methods makes herbal medicine work better. After docking or testing experimental data, enrichment studies that use artificial intelligence connect biological targets with their pathways through the KEGG and Reactome databases. The conventional p-value metric employed in traditional enrichment analysis introduces the possibility of erroneous outcomes. The pathway analysis that uses AI shows how lipid metabolism causes oxidative stress through its "pathway crosstalk" mechanisms Smith and Doe (2025). The AI system looks at how herbal treatments explain how their active ingredients affect many biological pathways. The "Herb-Target-Disease" Axis in herbal medicine "drug repositioning" needs network pharmacology, which uses AI to find links between herbs and their medical uses. AI investigates the entire "diseasome," which signifies the human disorder network, to uncover connections among seemingly unrelated medical conditions. An AI system can be used to test a herbal treatment for stomach ulcers when the protein-protein interaction (PPI) network of an inflammatory skin condition is very similar. In "network-based repurposing" research, deep learning algorithms figure out how "close" herbal targets are to the human interactome modules that are linked to diseases. The long history of using herbal remedies shows that they are safe, which means that it costs less to make new medical treatments.

PROBLEMS WITH NETWORK RESILIENCE AND DATA CONSOLIDATION

Data integration is hard because AI systems and network pharmacology systems are two technologies that work well together. Biological networks work by combining genomic, metabolomic, and proteomic data. The organization figures out what resources it needs based on the quality standards that are in place in different parts of the world. "Data Fusion" is the name of the current AI system. It makes databases that let users get information from many different data sources. Pharmacologists find it hard to understand how deep learning models are supposed to connect to each other because the models have complicated designs. The study demonstrates that "Explainable AI" (XAI) is an essential instrument that must be developed to address this issue. The AI system said something that was mostly about this road Johnson et al. (2025). AI models will help regulatory bodies figure out how herbal medicines affect different biological targets because they will make it easier for them to explain how they work. People don't trust traditional medicine because it doesn't have clear rules. But it will take a long time for people to trust it Integrative et a(2025).

PREDICTIVE MODELING AND ADMET: NAVIGATING THE PHARMACOKINETIC LANDSCAPE

THE INDISPENSABLE ROLE OF ADMET IN HERBAL LEAD IDENTIFICATION

The primary challenge of utilizing plant extracts as medicinal remedies necessitates comprehensive investigation by scientists into their entire pharmacokinetic processes, encompassing their entry into the system, distribution within the body, elimination, and current safety profile. Phytochemicals exhibited significant potential in laboratory evaluations. Their use in humans didn't work because the body didn't absorb them well enough and the liver enzymes broke them down too quickly, which caused unexpected systemic toxicity LIFE.PTML Model Development Targeting Calmodulin Pathway Proteins. (2025). The method necessitates substantial resources for implementation while concurrently producing numerous ethical dilemmas. The researchers utilized AI-driven predictive models to analyze diverse biological pathways. This technique allowed scientists to test a number of herbal compounds. Before we even test the extract in the lab, we can make very good guesses about how a plant-based drug will affect people's bodies. This method uses machine learning to look at molecular data.

AI-ENHANCED QSAR: MOVING FROM CHEMICAL STRUCTURE TO BIOLOGICAL ACTIVITY

Quantitative Structure-Activity Relationship (QSAR) modeling is the main way that pharmacology makes prediction models. When it first started, QSAR only used simple linear regression methods to do its analyses. Artificial intelligence (AI) technology now makes it possible to make non-linear QSAR models that use deep learning to look at the complicated structures found in phytochemicals. The researchers use molecular descriptors, which are numbers that show how big and shaped a molecule is, how much charge it has, and how hydrophobic it is, to guess how it will act in living things.

When researchers find a group of flavonoids that work well as antioxidants in the field of herbal discovery, an AI-based QSAR model looks at the chemical signatures of these compounds and suggests changes to their structure that involve adding hydroxyl or methoxyl groups to make them better at binding to COX-2 target enzymes.

DEEP LEARNING FOR TOXICITY PREDICTION: CLOSING THE "SAFETY GAP"

Many people believe that herbal drugs are "inherently safe," but this is not always the case. When people eat too much of certain phytochemicals or mix them with other substances, they can hurt their liver and kidneys. The addition of Multi-task Deep Neural Networks (MT-DNNs) as a new deep learning tool has changed the way we test for toxic substances. The models use large chemical databases like Tox21 and ClinTox Bioengineered Microneedles and Nanomedicine as Therapeutic Platform for Tissue Regeneration. (2025) to find toxicophores, which are molecular parts that cause harmful effects. The digital phase allows researchers to eliminate high-risk compounds which creates a "safety gap" that will decrease when researchers discover hazardous compounds in laboratories and when they use their findings on human subjects.

PREDICTING METABOLIC STABILITY AND INTERACTIONS BETWEEN HERBS AND DRUGS

The function of Cytochrome P450 CYP enzymes in the liver presents a distinct problem for research on herbal medicine. The enzymes from this group metabolize pharmaceutical compounds, but various herbal components interact with these enzymes by either inhibiting or activating their functions, which results in dangerous herb-drug interactions. St. John's Wort is well-known for raising CYP3A4 levels, which may speed up the removal of common drugs like blood thinners, making them less effective.

The current "metabolic stability" tests use AI systems to create predictive models through their simulation capabilities. Scientists can use Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs) or Transformers to predict the "metabolic fate" of a phytochemical, which means they can figure out what happens to the herb's metabolites as the body breaks it down. The process of determining chemical availability to living organisms requires this step. If an AI model says that a rare bark-based anti-cancer drug is 95% damaged by first-pass metabolism in the liver, researchers need to come up with a special way to deliver it, like a nano-emulsion, to protect the molecule and make sure it gets into the bloodstream.

HOW TO USE: ADDING ADMET TO VIRTUAL SCREENING

In modern computational workflows, ADMET prediction has evolved from a final evaluation to an integral filter in the virtual screening process. A functional workflow includes:

The initial stage of screening involves utilizing artificial intelligence to identify 5000 potential binding agents which will target the insulin receptor protein. The AI system functions as a "gatekeeper" to filter out compounds which violate "Lipinski's Rule of Five" and demonstrate high predicted toxicity from a total of 5,000 compounds. The 100 most effective compounds which show both strength and estimated oral bioavailability and lack any harmful effects will undergo testing in wet laboratories Emerging Protein Targets in Triple Negative Breast Cancer: Beyond Conventional Therapy. (2026).

PROBLEMS WITH PREDICTIVE MODELING: THE PROBLEM OF DATA DIVERSITY

AI systems that use ADMET data to find solutions to the "diversity gap" problem. Synthetic chemical molecule sets are used to teach machines how to do new tasks. Current chemical libraries do not show the full molecular structures of natural plant chemicals, such as macrocyclic lactones and phenols with a lot of glycosylation. Models that make predictions about the future need transfer learning techniques to be made Bridging Static Docking and Dynamic Enzyme Kinetics: A Tensor Approach. (2026). Users must possess a fundamental comprehension of chemistry to effectively utilize the system's assistance in studying natural products through designated datasets. Our model enhancements will enable us to forecast plant chemical interactions with human biological systems at the same accuracy level which exists for artificial drug research Future Directions in Personalized Herbal Medicine: An AI-Integrated Approach. (2026).

INTEGRATION CHALLENGES, ETHICS, AND THE "BLACK BOX" PROBLEM

DATA STANDARDIZATION AND THE HETEROGENEITY OF HERBAL RESEARCH

The primary technical obstacle to the extensive implementation of AI in herbal medication discovery is the absence of standardized high-quality data. AI models demonstrate their strength when trained on high-quality datasets that match their required data standards. Herbal medicine information exists in separate elements which traditional systems of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Ayurveda and African Ethnomedicine maintain. The different systems create substantial "noise" in public databases because they use distinct naming systems and extraction methods and biological testing procedures. The chemical makeup of a plant shows high variability based on its geographic location and the time of year and the soil composition of its growing environment. The discipline needs to implement a "FAIR" data strategy which enables users to find and access and share and reuse data. The process requires researchers to create standardized digital fingerprints for herbal extracts while they must document their experimental data with detailed metadata to enable AI models to analyze different environmental conditions.

THE "BLACK BOX" PROBLEM AND EXPLAINABLE AI (XAI)

The most advanced AI systems currently use Deep Neural Networks which do not provide clear methods for making decisions. The models operate as "black boxes" because they can predict which phytochemical compounds will bind to receptors but they do not show their prediction method. Scientists who want to develop new drugs must demonstrate through FDA and EMA requirements that their compounds show effective results. The business world developed Explainable AI XAI as a solution to this problem. The SHAP and LIME XAI techniques enable researchers to investigate the fundamental components of their models. XAI identifies specific atoms that create the anti-inflammatory effects by analyzing flavonoid structures. Clinicians need this level of transparency because they want to trust AI-based leads which use established biological principles.

ETHICS, TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE, AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

The use of AI technology to perform rapid knowledge "mining" enables the identification of profitable drug leads, which creates a biopiracy risk that results in original knowledge holders losing their intellectual property rights. The implementation of ethical artificial intelligence practices requires organizations to create benefit-sharing systems that include indigenous communities as equal partners in their research efforts rather than treating them as mere providers of information. The research must deal with bias risks that emerge from AI datasets because training data sources which come from Western clinical trials and particular botanical species will lead to inaccurate results when assessing remedies from less common cultures. Ethical drug discovery requires that AI models be trained on diverse, inclusive datasets that reflect the global heritage of herbal medicine.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The combination of artificial intelligence with molecular docking and network pharmacology and predictive modeling methods has created a new path for discovering herbal medicines. Our research has advanced from exploring plant chemistry through manual methods of trial-and-error testing to using rapid data-driven techniques that maintain the original complexity of botanical formulas. AI establishes scientific validation for traditional medicine through its capability to identify multi-target mechanisms and predict safety profiles with unmatched accuracy.

The future of this field lies in the development of Personalized Herbal Medicine. Our research will create personalized botanical treatments by combining artificial intelligence herbal discovery methods with patient-specific "Omics" data which includes genomics and proteomics and metabolomics information. "Lab-in-a-Loop" systems will provide "AI models that continuously learn from real-time laboratory validation" to develop a system which continuously improves its research capabilities. The computational strategies supported by artificial intelligence do not substitute for traditional medicine's expertise but they enable users to transform ancient knowledge into modern medical treatments which save lives in the 21st century.

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