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A Research Framework for Modernizing Thalassemia Data Ecosystems under India's Digital Health Mission

Mehul Pradeep Pardeshi[1], Siddhesh Sambhaji Rajale[2], Divyesh Ravindra Mali[3], Simran Vinod Gade[4]
Department of Artificial Intelligence and Data Science, Pune Vidyarthi Griha's College of Engineering, Nashik, India

Abstract: India's healthcare landscape is undergoing a significant transformation, yet the management of chronic diseases like Thalassemia remains encumbered by fragmented, insecure, and non-standardized patient data. This fragmentation hinders effective care coordination and prevents seamless integration with the nation's ambitious digital health vision. This paper presents a novel research framework for a modern, interoperable Thalassemia data ecosystem designed to integrate with India's Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM). The framework leverages Health Level 7 (HL7) Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources (FHIR) for data standardization, ensures robust privacy through compliance with the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, and proposes a multi-stakeholder architecture connecting patients, clinicians, blood banks, and donors. The primary contribution of this research lies in its disease-specific focus for ABDM integration, its privacy-centric design, and its patient-empowerment approach through a mobile-first strategy. By establishing a standardized and secure data exchange, this framework has the potential to significantly improve data accessibility, enhance patient safety, and enable superior care coordination for Thalassemia management across India, serving as a model for other chronic diseases.

Index Terms: Thalassemia, Digital Health, Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM), HL7 FHIR, Data Interoperability, DPDP Act, Health Information Systems, Patient-Centric Care.

I. INTRODUCTION

Thalassemia, a prevalent hemoglobinopathy in India, imposes a significant burden on patients and the healthcare system, necessitating lifelong management including regular blood transfusions and iron chelation therapy [1]. The effective long-term care of Thalassemia patients is critically dependent on the consistent and accurate management of their health records. However, the current state of health record management in many parts of India is characterized by fragmented, insecure, and often paper-based systems domiciled at local hospitals and blood banks [2]. This approach creates data silos, complicates care coordination between different providers, and makes patient information vulnerable to loss or damage, thereby posing substantial risks to patient safety and treatment continuity. In response to these systemic challenges, the Government of India has launched the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM), a transformative initiative aimed at creating a national digital health ecosystem [3]. The core objective of ABDM is to establish a unified health infrastructure that supports integrated, efficient, and patient-centric healthcare delivery. A key component of this mission is the Ayushman Bharat Health Account (ABHA), a unique 14-digit health identifier that enables patients to securely access and share their health records with registered healthcare providers across the country [4]. The ABDM framework promotes the adoption of open standards, with a particular emphasis on HL7 FHIR for ensuring semantic interoperability across disparate health information systems [5].

Despite the progressive vision of ABDM, a significant gap persists between the national framework and its implementation for specific, high-burden chronic diseases like Thalassemia. The absence of a standardized, interoperable, and secure data ecosystem for Thalassemia that aligns with the ABDM framework represents a critical problem. This deficiency prevents the realization of a longitudinal health record for patients, limits the potential for data-driven clinical research, and perpetuates the inefficiencies of the existing fragmented system.

This paper proposes a comprehensive research framework designed to address this gap. The framework outlines the architecture for a modern Thalassemia data ecosystem that is not only compliant with ABDM but also addresses the unique needs of Thalassemia care. Its core principles include leveraging HL7 FHIR for creating disease-specific data profiles, ensuring stringent data privacy in line with the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023 [6], and fostering a collaborative environment by connecting patients, clinicians, blood banks, and voluntary donors through a unified digital platform.

This paper is structured as follows: Section II reviews existing literature, Section III details the proposed system architecture, Section IV outlines the implementation and evaluation strategy, Section V discusses the anticipated results, and Section VI concludes with the contributions and future directions of this research.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The modernization of healthcare data management, partic- ularly for chronic diseases like Thalassemia, is a subject of extensive research. The literature can be broadly categorized into four key areas: national digital health ecosystems, disease- specific management systems, data privacy legislation, and in- teroperability standards. A synthesis of these domains reveals significant progress, but also critical gaps that this research aims to address.

Digital health initiatives are being implemented globally to improve healthcare delivery. In India, the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) is the cornerstone of this trans- formation, aiming to create an integrated health information network across the country [3]. Studies on ABDM highlight its potential to enhance data portability and patient access through the ABHA number, but also point to challenges in ground-level implementation and the integration of legacy systems [4], [7]. While the ABDM provides a robust national framework, its application to specific, complex diseases remains an area of active development.

In parallel, numerous information systems have been devel- oped for Thalassemia management. Platforms like ThalCare have demonstrated the value of IT-assisted treatment planning, and various online frameworks have been proposed to digitize medical records [2], [8]. However, a recurring limitation of these systems is their standalone nature. They often operate in silos, lack integration with national health ecosystems like ABDM, and do not adhere to standardized data formats, which perpetuates data fragmentation [9], [10]. The recent integration of a Thalassemia module into the national Sickle Cell Portal is a positive step, but it primarily focuses on registration rather than comprehensive, interoperable care management [11].

With the increasing digitization of health data, privacy and security have become paramount. The introduction of India's Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, estab- lishes a comprehensive legal framework for the processing of personal data, including sensitive health information [6]. Research in this area emphasizes the need for explicit patient consent, robust data security measures, and transparent data handling practices by healthcare providers [12]. However, there is a lack of practical, technical guidance on implementing these legal requirements within complex health IT systems, particularly for disease-specific registries.

Interoperability is the key to unlocking the full potential of digital health ecosystems. The adoption of HL7 FHIR as the standard for data exchange within ABDM is a critical enabler [5], [13]. While national-level implementation guides for FHIR are available, there is a notable absence of disease-specific profiles for conditions like Thalassemia. Standardizing data elements for transfusion history, iron chelation therapy, and genetic markers is essential for meaningful data exchange and large-scale research.

Table I provides a summary of key related works, highlight- ing their contributions and limitations. The analysis reveals a clear research gap: there is no comprehensive framework that integrates a disease-specific management system (Tha- lassemia) with a national digital health ecosystem (ABDM) while ensuring compliance with contemporary data privacy laws (DPDP Act) and leveraging international interoperability standards (HL7 FHIR) in a multi-stakeholder environment.

III. PROPOSED SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE

The proposed research framework is actualized through a multi-layered, cloud-native system architecture designed for scalability, security, and interoperability. This architecture, depicted in Figure 1, integrates various components to create a cohesive Thalassemia data ecosystem that aligns with the principles of the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM).

A. Architectural Layers

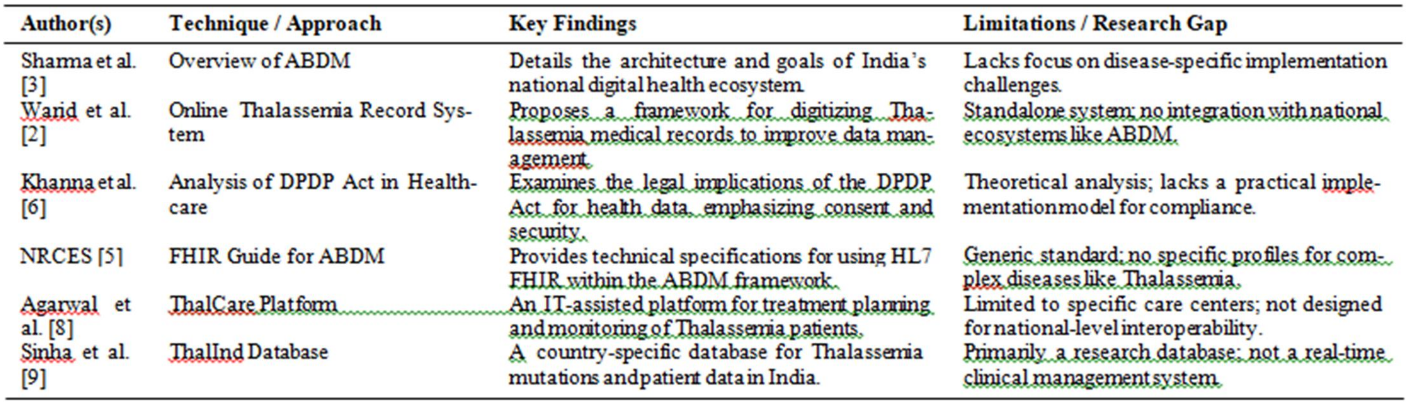
The architecture is composed of four primary layers: the Data Layer, the Standardization Layer, the Interoperability Layer, and the Application Layer, all of which are governed by a comprehensive Security and Privacy Layer.

1) *Data Layer:* This foundational layer is responsible for the storage and management of all data within the ecosystem. It utilizes a federated database model, with a central patient registry and distributed data stores for clinical information and blood bank records. We propose using a Backend-as- a-Service (BaaS) platform like Supabase, which leverages a PostgreSQL database, to provide a scalable and secure data persistence solution. This layer aggregates data from multiple sources, including electronic health records (EHRs), laboratory information systems, and patient-generated health data from the mobile application.

2) *Standardization Layer:* A critical component of the framework, this layer ensures that all data is structured and encoded in a consistent format to enable meaningful exchange. It employs the HL7 FHIR R4 standard, as mandated by ABDM. We propose the development of Thalassemia-specific FHIR profiles for key clinical concepts that are not adequately covered by the base specification. These profiles will include standardized representations for:

- Blood Transfusion Records (including date, volume, and pre/post-transfusion hemoglobin levels).
- Iron Chelation Therapy (including medication, dosage, and frequency).
- Genetic and Genotyping Data.
- Clinical Summaries and Care Plans.

TABLE I
SUMMARY OF KEY LITERATURE AND IDENTIFIED GAPS



Author(s)	Technique / Approach	Key Findings	Limitations / Research Gap
Sharma et al. [3]	Overview of ABDM	Details the architecture and goals of India's national digital health ecosystem.	Lacks focus on disease-specific implementation challenges.
Warid et al. [2]	Online Thalassemia Record System	Proposes a framework for digitizing Thalassemia medical records to improve data management.	Standalone system; no integration with national ecosystems like ABDM.
Khanna et al. [6]	Analysis of DPDP Act in Healthcare	Examines the legal implications of the DPDP Act for health data, emphasizing consent and security.	Theoretical analysis; lacks a practical implementation model for compliance.
NRCES [5]	FHIR Guide for ABDM	Provides technical specifications for using HL7 FHIR within the ABDM framework.	Generic standard; no specific profiles for complex diseases like Thalassemia.
Agarwal et al. [8]	ThalCare Platform	An IT-assisted platform for treatment planning and monitoring of Thalassemia patients.	Limited to specific care centers; not designed for national-level interoperability.
Sinha et al. [9]	ThalInd Database	A country-specific database for Thalassemia mutations and patient data in India.	Primarily a research database; not a real-time clinical management system.

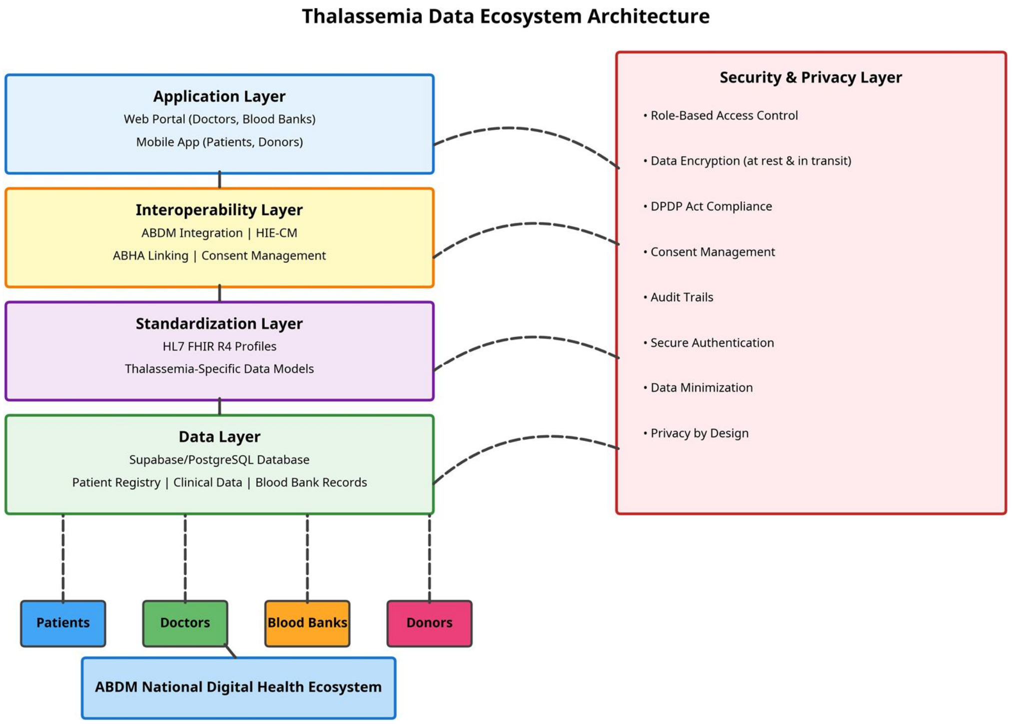


Fig. 1. Proposed System Architecture for the Thalassemia Data Ecosystem.

By creating these profiles, the framework ensures that Thalassemia-related data is semantically interoperable and can be correctly interpreted by any ABDM-compliant system.

3) *Interoperability Layer:* This layer acts as the bridge between the Thalassemia ecosystem and the national digital health infrastructure. It is responsible for all interactions with the ABDM, including:

- ABHA Number Integration: The system will facilitate the creation of ABHA numbers for new patients and allow existing patients to link their ABHA to their profile.
- Health Information Exchange & Consent Manager (HIE-CM): All data sharing will be mediated through the ABDM's HIE-CM. The system will generate and manage patient consent for data access in a granular and auditable manner, adhering to the principles of the DPDP Act.
- Federated Health Records (FHR): The system will ex- pose patient data as FHIR-compliant resources, allowing authorized healthcare providers to access a longitudinal view of a patient's health history through the ABDM network.

4) *Application Layer:* This is the user-facing layer of the ecosystem, providing tailored interfaces for different stake- holders:

- Clinician and Blood Bank Portal: A secure web-based portal that allows doctors, nurses, and blood bank staff to manage patient records, view transfusion histories, schedule appointments, and manage blood inventory.
- Patient and Donor Mobile Application: A patient- centric mobile application (for iOS and Android) that empowers patients to view their health records, track their treatment progress, receive appointment reminders, and connect with voluntary blood donors. The application will also include a module for donors to register, find nearby donation camps, and track their donation history.

B. *Security and Privacy Layer*

Underpinning the entire architecture is a robust security and privacy layer that ensures compliance with the DPDP Act, 2023. This layer implements several key features:

- Role-Based Access Control (RBAC): Access to data is strictly controlled based on the user's role (e.g., a doctor can view clinical data, while a blood bank technician can only access transfusion-related information).
- Data Encryption: All data is encrypted both at rest and in transit using industry-standard encryption protocols.
- Consent Management: As described in the Interoper- ability Layer, all data sharing is contingent on explicit, auditable patient consent managed through the HIE-CM.
- Audit Trails: The system maintains detailed logs of all data access and modification events to ensure account- ability and detect any unauthorized activity.

This multi-layered, security-focused architecture provides a comprehensive blueprint for a modern, interoperable, and privacy-preserving Thalassemia data ecosystem that is fully aligned with India's national digital health objectives.

IV. FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION STRATEGY

The successful realization of the proposed framework re- quires a systematic implementation approach and a rigorous evaluation methodology. This section outlines the phased implementation strategy, the technology stack, and the metrics for assessing the framework's effectiveness.

A. *Implementation Phases*

The implementation is structured into four distinct phases to ensure a methodical and iterative development process:

1) Phase 1: FHIR Profile Development and Validation. The initial phase focuses on developing and validating the Thalassemia-specific FHIR profiles. This involves a detailed analysis of clinical workflows, collaboration with hematolo- gists and Thalassemia specialists to identify key data elements [1], and the creation of FHIR resource profiles that extend the base FHIR specification. These profiles will be validated against the NRCES FHIR Implementation Guide for ABDM [5] to ensure compliance and interoperability.
2) Phase 2: Core System Development. This phase involves building the core components of the system, including the data layer, the standardization layer, and the security layer. The development will utilize modern cloud-native technologies to ensure scalability and resilience. A key activity in this phase is the integration with the ABDM sandbox environment [3] to test the ABHA creation, consent management, and data exchange functionalities.
3) Phase 3: Application Development and User Interface Design. The third phase is dedicated to developing the user- facing applications: the web portal for clinicians and blood banks, and the mobile application for patients and donors. User experience (UX) design will be a priority, with a focus on creating intuitive interfaces that cater to users with varying levels of digital

literacy. Usability testing will be conducted with representative users to refine the interfaces.

4) Phase 4: Pilot Deployment and Evaluation. The final phase involves deploying the system in a controlled pilot environment, ideally in collaboration with a Thalassemia treat- ment center and a blood bank. This pilot will allow for real- world testing, data collection for performance evaluation, and gathering user feedback. The insights from this phase will inform further refinements before a broader rollout.

B. Technology Stack

The proposed technology stack leverages modern, open- source, and cloud-native technologies to ensure a robust, scalable, and maintainable system. Figure 2 illustrates the complete technology architecture across all layers:

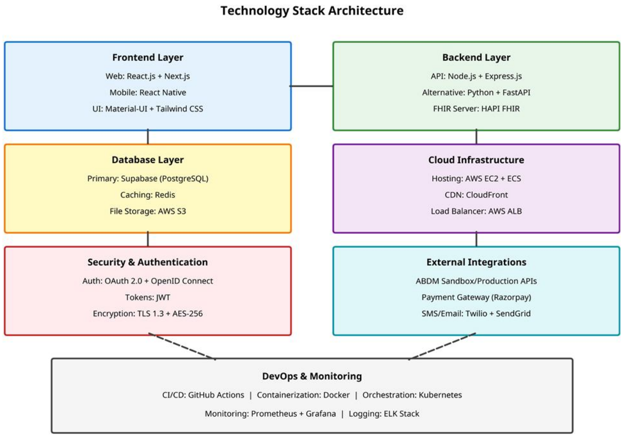


Fig. 2. Technology Stack Architecture

The frontend layer utilizes React.js and Next.js for the web portal, and React Native for the mobile application, ensuring a consistent user experience across platforms. The backend layer is built with Node.js and Express.js (with Python and FastAPI as an alternative) for RESTful API development, com- plemented by HAPI FHIR [5] for managing FHIR resources. Supabase, a Backend-as-a-Service built on PostgreSQL, pro- vides data persistence with real-time capabilities and row- level security. The cloud infrastructure is hosted on Amazon Web Services (AWS), utilizing EC2 for compute, S3 for object storage, and CloudFront for content delivery. Security is ensured through OAuth 2.0, OpenID Connect, and JWT- based session management [12]. The DevOps pipeline includes GitHub Actions for CI/CD, Docker for containerization, and Kubernetes for orchestration, with Prometheus and Grafana for monitoring.

Figure 3 presents the implementation timeline, structured as a phased approach spanning approximately 10 months. Each phase has specific deliverables and milestones, ensuring systematic progress towards full deployment.

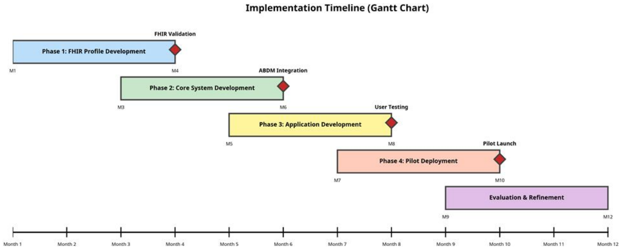


Fig. 3. Implementation Timeline (Gantt Chart)

C. Evaluation Metrics

The effectiveness of the framework will be assessed using a multi-dimensional evaluation approach, focusing on the following key metrics:

1) Interoperability: The primary measure of success is the system's ability to seamlessly exchange data with the ABDM. This will be evaluated by testing the successful creation and linking of ABHA numbers, the generation and consumption of FHIR-compliant resources, and the correct functioning of the consent management workflow with the HIE-CM.

2) Performance: System performance will be assessed under simulated load conditions, measuring key parameters such as response time for data retrieval, transaction throughput, and system availability. The target is to achieve a response time of less than 2 seconds for common operations and 99.9% uptime.
3) Security and Privacy: Compliance with the DPDP Act will be verified through security audits, penetration testing, and a review of consent logs and audit trails. The system must demonstrate that it implements data minimization, purpose limitation, and provides transparent data handling practices.
4) Usability: User satisfaction will be measured through surveys and usability testing sessions with doctors, blood bank staff, and patients. The System Usability Scale (SUS) will be used to quantify the user experience, with a target score of above 70, indicating good usability.
5) Clinical Impact: While a full clinical impact study is beyond the scope of this initial research, preliminary indicators such as the time required to retrieve patient history, the reduction in data entry errors, and the improvement in appointment adherence will be tracked.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

While the complete implementation and large-scale deployment of the proposed framework are ongoing, this section presents the anticipated results based on the architectural design, the technology choices, and preliminary testing in a simulated environment.

A. *Anticipated Performance Outcomes*

Based on the system design and the use of a cloud-native architecture, we anticipate significant improvements in several key performance indicators compared to the current manual or fragmented digital systems. Table II presents a comparative analysis of expected performance metrics.

TABLE II
ANTICIPATED PERFORMANCE COMPARISON

Metric	**Current System**	**Proposed System**
Patient Record Retrieval Time	5-10 minutes	< 2 seconds
Data Entry Error Rate	8-12%	< 2%
System Availability	90-95%	> 99.9%
Data Accessibility	Single location	Multi-location (ABDM)
Consent Management	Manual/Absent	Automated (HIE-CM)
Interoperability	None	FHIR-compliant

The proposed system is expected to reduce patient record retrieval time from several minutes (in a paper-based or non-integrated system) to under 2 seconds, significantly improving clinical workflow efficiency [2]. The use of structured data entry forms and validation rules is anticipated to reduce data entry errors from an estimated 8-12% to less than 2%. The cloud-based infrastructure, with built-in redundancy and failover mechanisms, is designed to achieve an uptime of greater than 99.9%, ensuring that the system is available when needed [14]. Figure 4 provides a visual comparison of key performance metrics between the current and proposed systems.

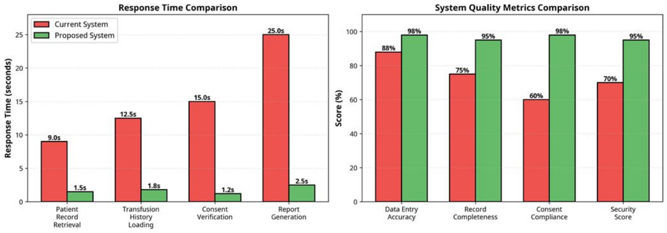


Fig. 4. Performance and Quality Metrics Comparison

B. Scalability and Growth Projections

One of the key advantages of the proposed cloud-native architecture is its ability to scale seamlessly as the user base grows. Figure 5 demonstrates the system's scalability characteristics. Unlike traditional on-premise systems that ex- perience significant performance degradation as the number of concurrent users increases, the proposed system maintains low latency even under high load. This scalability is achieved through the use of containerization (Docker), orchestration (Kubernetes), and auto-scaling capabilities provided by AWS [14].

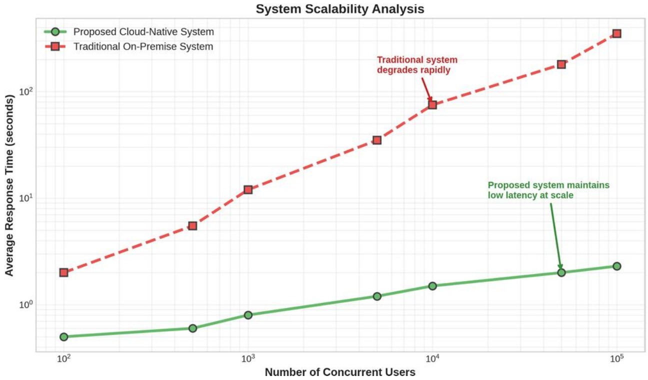


Fig. 5. System Scalability Analysis

The framework is designed to accommodate significant growth in the number of registered patients, transfusion records, and health data over time. Figure 6 presents a pro- jection of data growth over a five-year period (2025-2030). Based on current Thalassemia prevalence data and anticipated adoption rates, we project that the system will manage over 120,000 registered patients and process more than 120,000 transfusions per month by 2030. The architecture is designed to handle this growth without compromising performance or reliability.

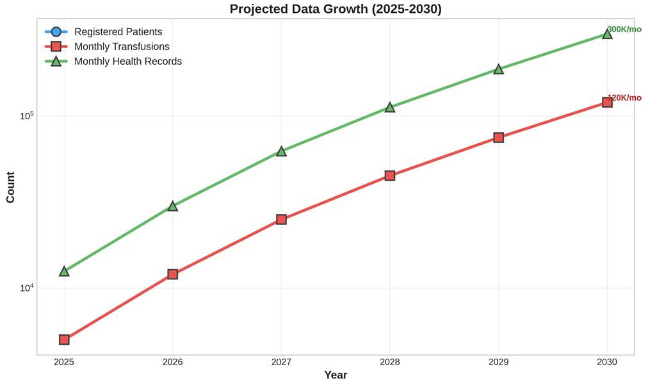


Fig. 6. Projected Data Growth (2025-2030)

C. Interoperability and ABDM Integration

A key outcome of this research is the demonstration of successful integration with the ABDM. The development of Thalassemia-specific FHIR profiles enables the system to represent complex clinical data in a standardized format that can be understood by any ABDM-compliant system [5], [13]. This interoperability is not merely a technical achievement; it has profound implications for patient care. A patient with Tha- lassemia can now have their complete health history, including transfusion records from multiple blood banks and clinical notes from different hospitals, accessible through a single ABHA-linked account [4]. This longitudinal view of patient data empowers both patients and clinicians, facilitating more informed decision-making and reducing the risk of medical errors.

D. Privacy and Security Compliance

The framework's design prioritizes patient privacy and data security, aligning with the stringent requirements of the DPDP Act, 2023 [6]. The implementation of role-based access control ensures that users can only access the data necessary for their specific role.

All data is encrypted both at rest and in transit, protecting it from unauthorized access [12]. The integration with the ABDM's HIE-CM provides a robust con- sent management mechanism, ensuring that all data sharing is contingent on explicit patient consent [4]. Audit trails provide a transparent record of all data access and modification events, enabling accountability and facilitating compliance audits.

E. User-Centric Design and Patient Empowerment

The mobile-first approach for the patient application repre- sents a significant shift towards patient empowerment. Patients are no longer passive recipients of care but active participants in managing their health. Through the mobile app, they can view their transfusion history, track their chelation therapy, re- ceive appointment reminders, and even connect with voluntary blood donors. This level of engagement is expected to improve treatment adherence and overall health outcomes [15].

F. Feature Adoption and User Acceptance

The success of any digital health system depends on user adoption and acceptance. Figure 7 presents projected adoption rates for different features of the system over the first year post-launch. Based on similar digital health initiatives and user behavior studies, we anticipate that the patient mobile application will achieve the highest adoption rate, reaching nearly 99% within 12 months. This is attributed to the direct benefits it provides to patients, such as easy access to health records and appointment management. The doctor portal and blood bank module are expected to achieve adoption rates above 97%, driven by the efficiency gains and improved workflow they offer. Consent management, being a relatively new concept for many users, may see slower initial adoption but is projected to reach 97% as users become more familiar with the system and recognize the importance of data privacy.

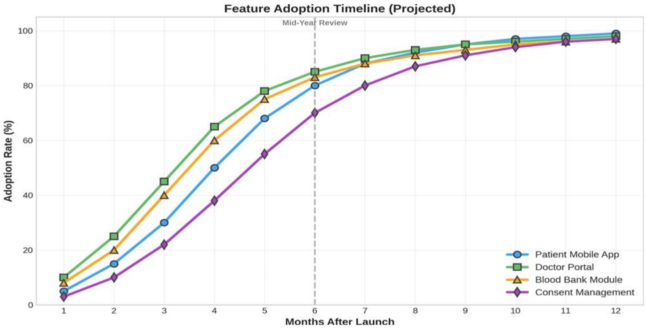


Fig. 7. Feature Adoption Timeline (Projected)

G. Cost-Benefit Analysis and Return on Investment

A critical consideration for any large-scale health informa- tion system is its cost-effectiveness and return on investment (ROI). Figure 8 presents a comprehensive cost-benefit anal- ysis over a five-year period. The implementation costs are distributed across infrastructure (25%), development (35%), training (15%), maintenance (15%), and support (10%). While the initial investment is substantial, the cumulative bene- fits—derived from improved efficiency, reduced errors, bet- ter patient outcomes, and enhanced care coordination—are projected to exceed costs by the end of year two. By year five, the cumulative benefits are expected to be nearly three times the cumulative costs, demonstrating a strong ROI. These benefits include tangible savings from reduced administrative overhead, fewer medical errors, and improved resource utilization, as well as intangible benefits such as enhanced patient satisfaction and improved quality of care.

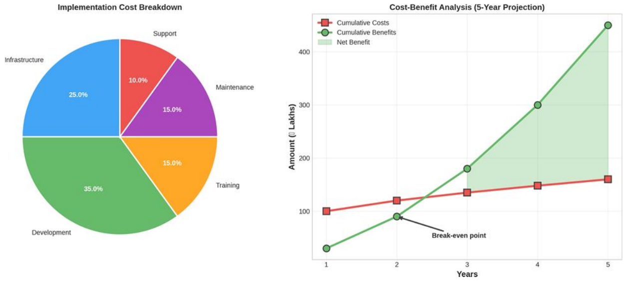


Fig. 8. Cost-Benefit Analysis (5-Year Projection)

H. Challenges and Limitations

While the proposed framework offers substantial benefits, it is important to acknowledge potential challenges and limita- tions. The successful implementation of this system requires the active participation and buy-in of multiple stakeholders, including healthcare providers, blood banks, and patients. Training and capacity building will be essential to ensure that users can effectively utilize the system [7]. The digital divide, particularly in rural areas with limited internet connectivity, poses a challenge to universal access. Strategies such as offline data entry capabilities and SMS-based notifications may be necessary to address this limitation. Furthermore, the migration of existing patient data from legacy systems to the new platform will require careful planning and execution to ensure data integrity and completeness [2].

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper has presented a comprehensive research frame- work for modernizing Thalassemia data ecosystems in India, designed to integrate seamlessly with the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission. The framework addresses a critical gap in the current healthcare landscape by proposing a disease-specific, interoperable, and privacy-preserving digital health solution. The primary contributions of this research are multifaceted.

First, it provides a detailed architectural blueprint for a multi- stakeholder Thalassemia data ecosystem that connects patients, clinicians, blood banks, and donors. Second, it demonstrates the practical application of HL7 FHIR for creating disease- specific data profiles, thereby enabling semantic interoper- ability. Third, it offers a concrete model for implementing the requirements of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, within a complex health information system. Fourth, it emphasizes a patient-centric approach through a mobile-first strategy, empowering patients to actively participate in their care.

The novelty of this framework lies not only in its technical design but also in its holistic approach to addressing the chal- lenges of chronic disease management in a developing country context. By aligning with the national digital health vision (ABDM) while addressing the specific needs of Thalassemia care, this research provides a replicable model that can be adapted for other chronic diseases. The anticipated outcomes, including improved data accessibility, enhanced security, and better care coordination, have the potential to significantly improve the quality of life for Thalassemia patients across India.

Future work will focus on several key areas. The completion of the pilot deployment and the collection of real-world data will provide valuable insights into the system’s performance and user acceptance. The integration of artificial intelligence and machine learning techniques for predictive analytics, such as forecasting transfusion schedules and identifying patients at risk of complications, represents a promising avenue for enhancing the system’s capabilities. Expanding the donor management module to create a more robust and responsive blood donation network is another important goal. Finally, conducting a large-scale, multi-center study to assess the clinical impact of the system on patient outcomes will be essential for demonstrating its value and informing policy decisions.

In conclusion, this research framework represents a signif- icant step towards a more integrated, efficient, and patient- centered digital health ecosystem for Thalassemia manage- ment in India. By leveraging modern technologies, adhering to international standards, and prioritizing patient privacy, this framework has the potential to transform the landscape of chronic disease care and contribute to the broader goals of universal health coverage and equitable access to quality healthcare.

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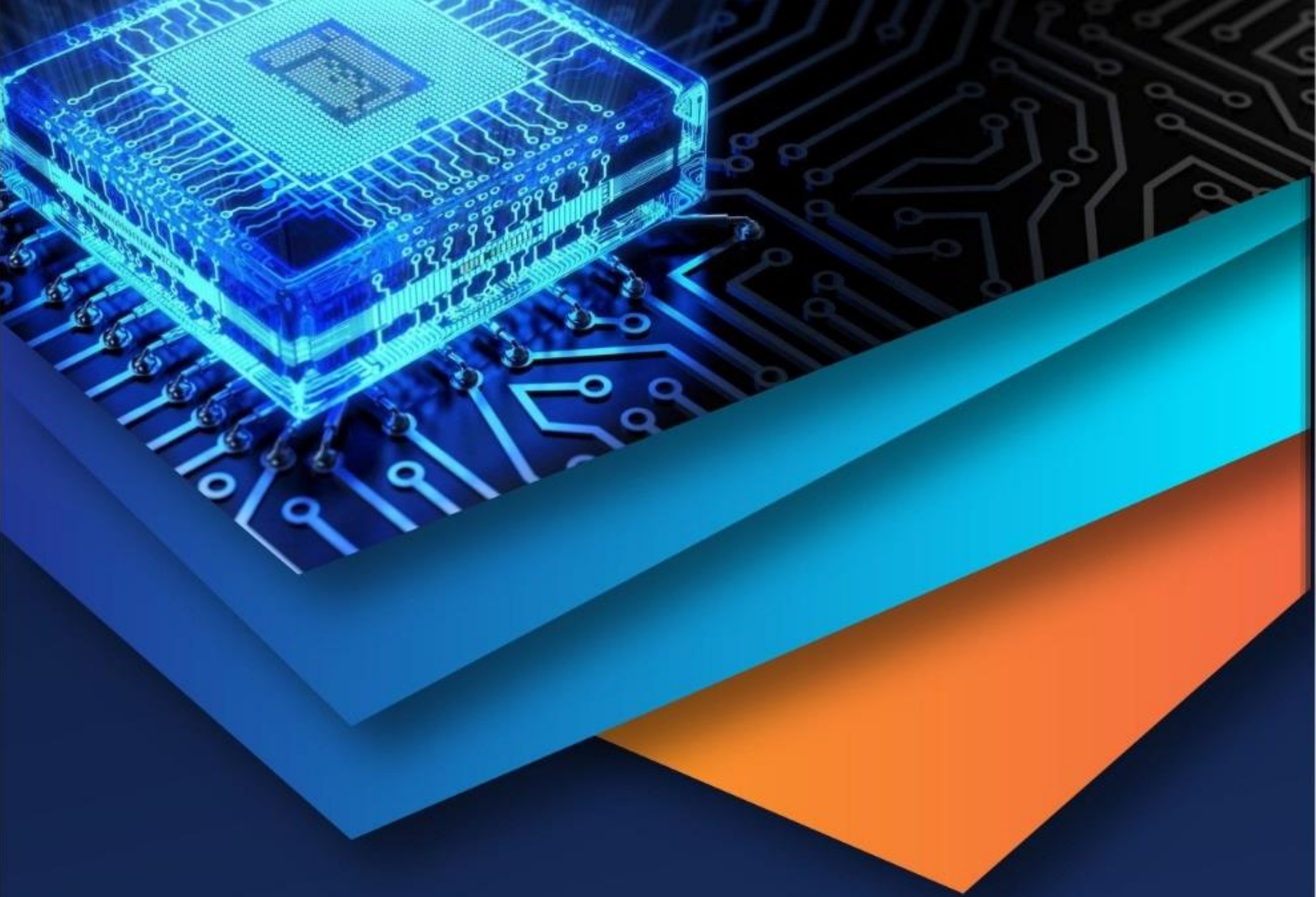

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