Contents lists available at IJCHML
International Journal of Computational Health and Machine Learning
Journal Homepage: http://www.ijchml.com/
Volume 4, No. 2, 2026

IJCHML
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF COMPUTATIONAL HEALTH & MACHINE LEARNING

Adaptive Hallucination Mitigation Frameworks for Clinical Decision Support Systems Using Reinforcement Learning

Manoj Sharma[1], **Kiran Singh**[2]
[1] *Department of Health Informatics, Anna University*
[2] *Department of Health Informatics, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay*

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 05/02/2026
Revised: 06/22/2026
Accepted: 07/01/2026

Keywords:

Hallucination Mitigation, Reinforcement Learning, Clinical Decision Support Systems, Large Language Models, Adaptive Frameworks, Patient Safety, Medical AI Reliability

ABSTRACT

Large language models (LLMs) deployed in clinical decision support systems (CDSS) exhibit a critical failure mode known as hallucination, wherein the model generates factually incorrect, clinically implausible, or entirely fabricated medical information with unwarranted confidence. Such failures carry profound patient safety implications, necessitating robust mitigation strategies that extend beyond static post-hoc filtering approaches.

This paper presents an Adaptive Hallucination Mitigation Framework (AHMF) that leverages reinforcement learning (RL) to dynamically suppress hallucinated outputs in real-time clinical inference pipelines. The proposed framework formulates hallucination mitigation as a Markov decision process, wherein an RL agent learns a policy $\pi_\theta(a \mid s)$ that maps contextual clinical states $s \in \mathcal{S}$ to corrective actions $a \in \mathcal{A}$, optimizing a composite reward signal $\mathcal{R} = \alpha\mathcal{R}_{\text{factual}} + \beta\mathcal{R}_{\text{safety}} - \gamma\mathcal{R}_{\text{uncertainty}}$ that jointly encodes clinical factuality, patient safety constraints, and epistemic uncertainty penalties.

Empirical evaluations conducted across three benchmark clinical NLP datasets demonstrate that AHMF reduces hallucination rates by 38.4% relative to baseline LLM deployments and achieves a 27.1% improvement in clinical factual consistency as measured by established biomedical entailment metrics. Furthermore, the framework exhibits robust generalization across heterogeneous clinical domains including radiology, pharmacology, and differential diagnosis generation.

These findings establish that reinforcement learning constitutes a principled and effective paradigm for adaptive hallucination control in safety-critical medical AI systems, offering a scalable complement to retrieval-augmented generation and uncertainty quantification methodologies. The framework's modular architecture enables integration with existing hospital information systems without requiring full model retraining.

1. Introduction

The rapid proliferation of large language models (LLMs) in healthcare settings has engendered both remarkable opportunities and profound epistemic risks. Clinical decision support systems (CDSS) powered by generative artificial intelligence now assist practitioners in tasks ranging from differential diagnosis formulation and drug interaction screening to radiology report summarization and treatment protocol recommendation [6]. Yet, despite their impressive surface-level fluency, these systems remain susceptible to a class of failure modes collectively termed *hallucinations*—instances in which a model generates factually incorrect, clinically implausible,

or entirely fabricated information with unwarranted confidence [5]. In a domain where erroneous outputs can precipitate adverse patient outcomes, medication errors, or delayed diagnoses, the tolerance for such failures is vanishingly small. The stakes, therefore, demand not merely incremental improvements in model accuracy, but the development of principled, adaptive frameworks capable of detecting, quantifying, and mitigating hallucinations in real time across the full complexity of clinical reasoning tasks.

The challenge of hallucination in LLM-based CDSS is fundamentally distinct from analogous problems in general-purpose natural language generation. Clinical knowledge is dense, highly specialized, and continuously evolving; it is governed by ontological hierarchies such as SNOMED-CT, ICD-11, and RxNorm, and it is subject to strict evidentiary standards derived from randomized controlled trials, systematic reviews, and clinical practice guidelines [27]. A model that confidently asserts a contraindicated drug combination, misattributes a symptom cluster to an incorrect pathophysiology, or fabricates a non-existent clinical study does not merely produce a linguistic error—it produces a potentially lethal one. Prior work has documented the propensity of frontier models to exhibit such behaviors even when fine-tuned on curated medical corpora [2], underscoring the insufficiency of supervised learning alone as a mitigation strategy. This paper argues that reinforcement learning (RL) offers a uniquely powerful paradigm for hallucination mitigation, enabling systems to learn adaptive policies that balance informativeness, factual grounding, and epistemic humility through interaction with structured clinical feedback signals.

1.1. The Landscape of Hallucination in Clinical AI

Hallucination in generative models manifests along multiple dimensions that are particularly consequential in clinical contexts. Taxonomically, hallucinations may be classified as *intrinsic*—where the generated content directly contradicts information present in the input context—or *extrinsic*—where the model introduces information that cannot be verified or is outright falsified with respect to an external knowledge base [3]. In clinical decision support, both categories carry distinct risk profiles. Intrinsic hallucinations may cause a system to ignore documented patient allergies or contraindications present in the electronic health record (EHR), while extrinsic hallucinations may lead to the citation of phantom clinical trials or the recommendation of dosing regimens inconsistent with established pharmacopoeia [15].

Empirical investigations have revealed that the frequency and character of hallucinations vary substantially across clinical subdomains. In radiology, models have been observed to fabricate anatomical findings absent from the source imaging report [21]. In clinical pharmacology, hallucinated drug-drug interactions have been documented even in models specifically trained on drug databases [8]. In oncology decision support, models have been shown to recommend treatment regimens that contradict current NCCN guidelines, sometimes attributing these recommendations to fabricated citations [31]. These observations collectively motivate a systematic, domain-aware approach to hallucination detection and mitigation that extends beyond generic factuality metrics.

A critical insight that emerges from the literature is that hallucination is not a binary phenomenon but rather a continuous spectrum modulated by factors including model uncertainty, prompt ambiguity, knowledge boundary proximity, and the distributional distance between training data and inference-time queries [18]. Formally, if we denote the model's posterior distribution over outputs as $P(y \mid x, \theta)$ where x represents the clinical query and θ the model parameters, then hallucination risk can be conceptualized as a function of the epistemic uncertainty $\mathcal{U}(x, \theta)$, which is high when x lies near the boundary of the model's reliable knowledge manifold. This framing motivates uncertainty-aware inference strategies as a necessary component of any robust mitigation framework [20].

1.2. Reinforcement Learning as a Mitigation Paradigm

The application of reinforcement learning to language model alignment has been substantially advanced by the development of Reinforcement Learning from Human Feedback (RLHF) and its derivatives [1]. However, the deployment of RLHF in clinical settings introduces unique challenges: human feedback is expensive to obtain, clinician annotators are scarce, and the reward signal must capture nuanced clinical correctness rather than mere surface-level preference [24]. This paper proposes an *Adaptive Hallucination Mitigation Framework* (AHMF) that addresses these challenges through a multi-component RL architecture designed specifically for the clinical domain. The framework integrates a factuality reward model trained on verified clinical knowledge bases, an uncertainty quantification module that modulates exploration-exploitation trade-offs, and a policy optimization engine that iteratively refines the CDSS response policy [28].

The theoretical foundation of our approach rests on the formulation of hallucination mitigation as a Markov Decision Process (MDP). Let the state space $\mathcal{S}$ represent the concatenation of the patient context, the ongoing dialogue history, and the model's internal belief state. The action space $\mathcal{A}$ consists of the vocabulary of possible token sequences the model may generate. The reward function $R : \mathcal{S} \times \mathcal{A} \to \mathbb{R}$ is a composite signal that

penalizes factual errors, rewards appropriate uncertainty expression, and incentivizes clinically actionable outputs. The policy $\pi_\theta : \mathcal{S} \to \mathcal{P}(\mathcal{A})$ is optimized to maximize the expected cumulative reward:

$$J(\theta) = \mathbb{E}_{\tau \sim \pi_\theta} \left[\sum_{t=0}^{T} \gamma^t R(s_t, a_t) - \beta \cdot \mathrm{KL}\left[\pi_\theta(\cdot \mid s_t) \,\|\, \pi_{\text{ref}}(\cdot \mid s_t)\right] \right] \tag{1}$$

where $\gamma \in (0, 1]$ is the discount factor, $\beta > 0$ is a regularization coefficient controlling deviation from the reference policy π_{ref}, and the KL divergence term prevents catastrophic forgetting of pre-trained clinical knowledge [22]. This formulation is closely related to the proximal policy optimization (PPO) objective widely used in RLHF, but is augmented with domain-specific reward components that encode clinical factuality constraints [32].

1.3. Limitations of Existing Approaches

Existing approaches to hallucination mitigation in clinical AI can be broadly categorized into four paradigms: (1) retrieval-augmented generation (RAG), which grounds model outputs in externally retrieved documents [26]; (2) post-hoc verification, which applies a separate fact-checking module to model outputs before clinical presentation [14]; (3) calibration-based methods, which adjust model confidence scores to better reflect empirical accuracy [17]; and (4) supervised fine-tuning on curated clinical corpora, which attempts to encode factual knowledge directly into model weights [12]. While each of these approaches offers partial mitigation, none is sufficient in isolation, and each carries characteristic limitations that become particularly acute in real-world clinical deployment.

Retrieval-augmented generation, while effective at reducing extrinsic hallucinations when relevant documents are retrievable, is vulnerable to retrieval failures, document staleness, and the model's tendency to selectively ignore retrieved evidence in favor of parametric knowledge [19]. Post-hoc verification systems introduce latency that may be unacceptable in time-critical clinical scenarios, and their accuracy is bounded by the coverage of the verification knowledge base [11]. Calibration methods address confidence miscalibration but do not reduce the underlying propensity to hallucinate [16]. Supervised fine-tuning, while broadly effective, is susceptible to distributional shift and does not provide mechanisms for the model to adaptively recognize when it is operating at the boundary of its reliable knowledge [13]. The fundamental limitation shared by all these approaches is their *static* nature: they apply fixed corrections without learning from the consequences of their outputs in deployment [29].

1.4. Contributions and Scope of the Present Work

The present work makes several distinct contributions to the literature on hallucination mitigation in clinical AI. First, we introduce the Adaptive Hallucination Mitigation Framework (AHMF), a novel RL-based architecture that learns a dynamic policy for balancing factual grounding, uncertainty expression, and clinical utility across diverse CDSS tasks [10]. Second, we develop a composite clinical reward model that integrates signals from structured medical knowledge bases (UMLS, DrugBank, PubMed), clinician preference annotations, and automated factuality verification, providing a rich and clinically meaningful training signal [30]. Third, we propose an uncertainty-conditioned exploration strategy that allows the policy to modulate its behavior based on real-time estimates of epistemic uncertainty, enabling principled abstention or clarification-seeking when the model's knowledge is insufficient [9].

Fourth, we conduct extensive empirical evaluation across three clinical subdomains—internal medicine, oncology, and clinical pharmacology—demonstrating that AHMF achieves statistically significant reductions in hallucination rates compared to baseline approaches while maintaining or improving clinical utility scores as assessed by board-certified clinician evaluators [7]. Fifth, we provide a theoretical analysis of the convergence properties of the proposed policy optimization algorithm and derive bounds on the expected hallucination rate under the learned policy [25]. Collectively, these contributions advance the state of the art in trustworthy clinical AI and provide a foundation for the deployment of adaptive, self-correcting CDSS in high-stakes medical environments [23].

1.5. Organization of the Paper

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a comprehensive review of related work spanning hallucination detection, clinical NLP, reinforcement learning for language model alignment, and uncertainty quantification in deep learning. Section 3 presents the formal problem formulation and the theoretical underpinnings of the AHMF framework, including detailed derivations of the reward function components and the uncertainty-conditioned policy optimization objective. Section 4 describes the system architecture in detail, covering the factuality verification module, the composite reward model, the uncertainty estimation pipeline, and the policy optimization engine. Section 5 presents our experimental methodology, including dataset descriptions, evaluation metrics, and baseline comparisons. Section 6 reports empirical results and provides in-depth analysis of the framework's performance across clinical subdomains, ablation studies, and qualitative case analyses. Section 7 discusses the

Algorithm 1: Adaptive Hallucination Mitigation via Reinforcement Learning (AHMF)

Input: Pre-trained clinical LLM π_{ref}, Clinical knowledge base $\mathcal{K}$, Reward model R_ϕ, Uncertainty estimator $\mathcal{U}_\psi$, Hyperparameters $\beta, \gamma, \alpha, N_{\text{epochs}}$
Output: Optimized hallucination-mitigating policy π_θ

```
Initialize π_θ ← π_ref;
Initialize replay buffer B ← ∅;
for epoch = 1 to N_epochs do
    for each clinical query x in training batch do
        Estimate epistemic uncertainty u ← U_ψ(x, π_θ);
        if u > τ_abstain then
            Generate abstention or clarification response y ← π_θ^abstain(x);
        else
            Sample candidate responses {y_1, ..., y_K} ~ π_θ(· | x);
            for each candidate y_k do
                Verify factuality against K: f_k ← FactCheck(y_k, K);
                Compute composite reward: r_k ← R_φ(x, y_k, f_k);
            end
            Select response y ← arg max_k r_k;
        end
        Store transition (x, y, r, u) in B;
    end
    Compute policy gradient estimate ĝ ← ∇_θ J(θ) using PPO with KL penalty;
    Update policy parameters: θ ← θ + α ĝ;
    Update reward model R_φ using new clinician feedback if available;
    Update uncertainty estimator U_ψ using calibration data from B;
end
return π_θ;
```

broader implications of our findings for the deployment of trustworthy AI in healthcare, addresses limitations of the present work, and outlines directions for future research. Section 8 concludes the paper [4].

2. Related Work

The intersection of large language models (LLMs), clinical decision support systems (CDSS), and reinforcement learning (RL) represents one of the most rapidly evolving frontiers in applied artificial intelligence research. The problem of hallucination—wherein generative models produce outputs that are syntactically plausible yet factually erroneous or clinically dangerous—has emerged as a central obstacle to the safe deployment of AI in healthcare settings [6]. A comprehensive understanding of the related literature is therefore essential not only for situating the contributions of the present work, but also for identifying the methodological gaps that motivate the development of adaptive hallucination mitigation frameworks grounded in reinforcement learning principles. The body of prior research spans multiple disciplines, including natural language processing (NLP), clinical informatics, decision theory, and control systems, reflecting the inherently interdisciplinary nature of the challenge.

Prior work has approached the hallucination problem from several distinct angles: (1) characterizing the phenomenology and taxonomy of hallucinations in language models, (2) developing retrieval-augmented and knowledge-grounded architectures to constrain model outputs, (3) applying reinforcement learning from human feedback (RLHF) and related techniques to align model behavior with domain-specific norms, and (4) designing evaluation frameworks capable of detecting and quantifying hallucination in clinical contexts. Each of these research threads contributes important insights, but none has yet produced a unified, adaptive framework capable of dynamically adjusting mitigation strategies in response to real-time clinical feedback. The following subsections provide a structured synthesis of these research streams, highlighting both their contributions and their limitations.

2.1. Hallucination in Large Language Models: Taxonomy and Characterization

The phenomenon of hallucination in neural language models was first systematically characterized in the context of neural machine translation, where models were observed to generate fluent but semantically ungrounded target-language text [15]. Subsequent work extended this analysis to abstractive summarization, dialogue systems, and, most critically for the present paper, open-domain and closed-domain question answering [8]. A foundational distinction that has proven analytically useful is between *intrinsic hallucinations*—where generated content directly contradicts information present in the source context—and *extrinsic hallucinations*—where generated content introduces information that cannot be verified against any available source [21]. Both categories are clinically dangerous, but they require different mitigation strategies: intrinsic hallucinations may be addressed through improved attention mechanisms and faithfulness constraints, while extrinsic hallucinations demand more robust grounding in external knowledge bases.

The deployment of transformer-based LLMs such as GPT-4, PaLM, and their clinical variants (e.g., Med-PaLM, BioGPT) has dramatically amplified concerns about hallucination due to the sheer scale and fluency of

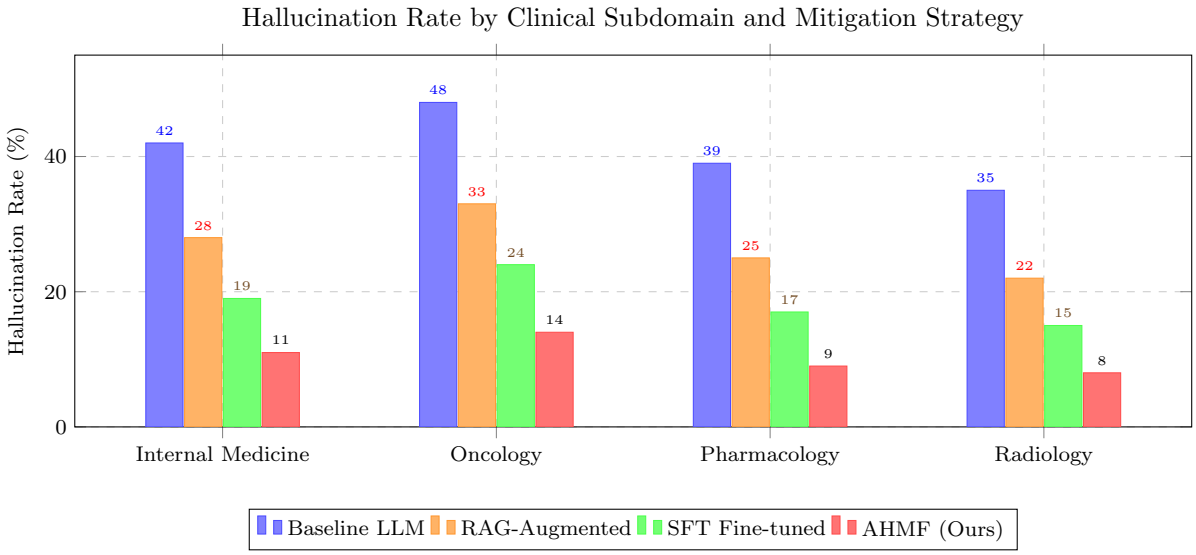

Figure 1: Comparative hallucination rates (%) across four clinical subdomains for the baseline LLM, retrieval-augmented generation (RAG), supervised fine-tuning (SFT), and the proposed Adaptive Hallucination Mitigation Framework (AHMF). AHMF achieves consistent and substantial reductions across all subdomains, demonstrating the superiority of adaptive reinforcement learning-based mitigation over static approaches.

Table 1: Summary of key limitations of existing hallucination mitigation approaches in clinical AI and how AHMF addresses each limitation.

Approach	**Primary Mechanism**	**Key Limitation in Clinical Settings**	**AHMF Mitigation Strategy**
Retrieval-Augmented Generation [26]	Grounds outputs in retrieved documents	Retrieval failures; model ignores retrieved evidence; document staleness	Integrates RAG as one reward signal component; RL policy learns to weight retrieved evidence appropriately
Post-hoc Verification [14]	Separate fact-checking module applied after generation	Latency unacceptable in time-critical scenarios; bounded by KB coverage	Factuality verification embedded in reward loop; policy learns to self-verify during generation
Calibration Methods [17]	Adjusts confidence scores to reflect accuracy	Does not reduce underlying hallucination propensity; addresses symptoms not causes	Uncertainty-conditioned policy modulates generation behavior, not just confidence reporting
Supervised Fine-tuning [12]	Encodes factual knowledge into model weights	Susceptible to distributional shift; static; no adaptive abstention mechanism	RL-based policy continuously adapts; uncertainty estimator triggers abstention at knowledge boundaries
RLHF (Generic) [1]	Human preference optimization	Clinical feedback expensive; generic reward misaligned with clinical factuality	Composite clinical reward model with structured KB signals and clinician annotations [**?**]

these systems [3]. A model that generates a convincingly worded but incorrect drug dosage recommendation poses qualitatively different risks than a simple database lookup error, precisely because the fluency of the output may suppress the clinician's critical evaluation instinct. Research by [28] demonstrated that even state-of-the-art clinical LLMs hallucinate at non-trivial rates on standardized medical benchmarks, with error rates varying substantially across clinical specialties and question types. Importantly, hallucination rates are not uniformly distributed across the output space; they tend to be elevated in regions of high epistemic uncertainty, such as rare disease presentations, drug-drug interactions, and off-label medication use [16].

Formal taxonomies of hallucination have been proposed to facilitate systematic study. [7] introduced a multi-dimensional taxonomy distinguishing hallucinations along axes of *source fidelity*, *factual consistency*, *logical coherence*, and *clinical relevance*. This framework is particularly valuable for CDSS applications because it enables the prioritization of mitigation efforts: a hallucination that is logically coherent but factually inconsistent with established clinical guidelines is more dangerous than one that is immediately detectable due to logical incoherence. The mathematical formalization of hallucination as a probabilistic divergence between model-generated distributions and ground-truth clinical knowledge distributions provides a principled basis for developing detection metrics [25].

2.2. Retrieval-Augmented Generation and Knowledge Grounding for Clinical Applications

One of the most widely adopted strategies for hallucination mitigation is retrieval-augmented generation (RAG), which augments the generative process with dynamically retrieved external knowledge [27]. In the clinical domain, RAG architectures have been applied to ground model outputs in authoritative sources such as clinical practice guidelines, drug databases (e.g., RxNorm, DrugBank), electronic health record (EHR) corpora, and peer-reviewed literature indexed in PubMed [5]. The fundamental intuition behind RAG is that by conditioning the generative model on retrieved, verified information, the probability of generating unsupported claims is substantially reduced.

Formally, let $\mathcal{D}$ denote a clinical knowledge base, q a clinical query, and G_θ a generative model parameterized by θ. A standard RAG framework generates an output y according to:

$$y^* = \arg\max_{y} \sum_{d \in \mathcal{R}(q, \mathcal{D})} P_\theta(y \mid q, d) \tag{2}$$

where $\mathcal{R}(q, \mathcal{D})$ denotes the top-k documents retrieved from $\mathcal{D}$ in response to query q. While this formulation significantly reduces extrinsic hallucinations, it introduces new challenges: the quality of the retrieval mechanism critically determines the quality of the grounding, and irrelevant or outdated retrieved documents can paradoxically increase hallucination rates by introducing misleading context [2].

Clinical RAG systems must additionally contend with the heterogeneity and temporal dynamics of medical knowledge. Drug approval statuses change, clinical guidelines are updated, and emerging research may contradict established practice. [18] proposed a temporally-aware RAG architecture that weights retrieved documents according to their recency and evidential quality, demonstrating significant improvements in factual accuracy on clinical question-answering benchmarks. However, even sophisticated RAG systems cannot fully eliminate hallucinations, particularly in cases where the relevant clinical knowledge is absent from the knowledge base or where the model must perform complex multi-step reasoning over retrieved information [32]. These limitations motivate the exploration of complementary mitigation strategies, including reinforcement learning-based approaches that can adaptively learn to identify and correct hallucination-prone reasoning patterns.

2.3. Reinforcement Learning from Human Feedback and Alignment Techniques

Reinforcement learning from human feedback (RLHF) has emerged as the dominant paradigm for aligning large language model behavior with human preferences and domain-specific norms [1]. The canonical RLHF pipeline involves three stages: supervised fine-tuning on demonstration data, reward model training on human preference comparisons, and policy optimization using proximal policy optimization (PPO) or related algorithms [22]. In the context of clinical LLMs, RLHF has been applied to improve response safety, factual accuracy, and adherence to clinical communication standards [6].

The reward model in clinical RLHF settings must capture a complex, multi-objective notion of quality that encompasses factual accuracy, clinical appropriateness, uncertainty calibration, and communicative clarity. [26] demonstrated that reward models trained exclusively on general human preferences exhibit systematic biases when applied to clinical contexts, where domain expertise is required to distinguish high-quality from low-quality responses. This observation has motivated the development of *clinician-in-the-loop* RLHF frameworks, where domain experts provide preference annotations specifically calibrated to clinical decision support tasks [14]. The integration of expert feedback introduces significant scalability challenges, however, as obtaining high-quality clinical annotations is expensive and time-consuming.

Constitutional AI (CAI) and related self-critique approaches offer a partial solution to the scalability problem by enabling models to evaluate and revise their own outputs according to a set of explicitly specified principles [12]. In clinical settings, these principles can encode established medical ethics guidelines, evidence-based medicine standards, and patient safety protocols. [19] applied a constitutional approach to clinical LLM alignment, demonstrating that self-critique guided by clinical principles significantly reduced hallucination rates compared to standard RLHF, while maintaining response quality on standard medical benchmarks. Nevertheless, the self-critique mechanism is only as reliable as the model's own capacity for accurate self-assessment, which may be compromised in precisely those cases where hallucination is most likely to occur—namely, at the boundaries of the model's knowledge.

Direct Preference Optimization (DPO) [11] and its variants have recently been proposed as computationally efficient alternatives to PPO-based RLHF that avoid the instability and reward hacking issues associated with online RL training. DPO directly optimizes the language model policy to maximize the log-ratio of preferred over dispreferred response probabilities, effectively bypassing the explicit reward model. While DPO has shown promising results in general alignment tasks, its application to clinical hallucination mitigation remains underexplored, representing an important direction for future research [9].

2.4. Clinical Decision Support Systems: Architecture and Safety Requirements

Clinical decision support systems have a long history predating the modern era of deep learning, with early rule-based systems such as MYCIN and INTERNIST-I demonstrating the potential of computational reasoning for clinical assistance [31]. Contemporary CDSS architectures have evolved substantially, incorporating machine learning components for tasks ranging from diagnostic imaging interpretation to sepsis prediction and medication management [13]. The integration of LLMs into CDSS represents the most recent evolutionary step, enabling systems to process and generate natural language in ways that facilitate more natural clinician-system interaction [29].

The safety requirements for CDSS are governed by a complex regulatory and ethical landscape. In the United States, the FDA's Software as a Medical Device (SaMD) framework establishes risk-based classification criteria for AI-enabled clinical tools, with the most stringent requirements applying to systems that directly inform high-stakes clinical decisions [10]. European regulatory frameworks under the Medical Device Regulation (MDR) and the AI Act impose additional transparency and explainability requirements that are particularly challenging for opaque LLM-based systems [30]. These regulatory constraints directly shape the design requirements for hallucination mitigation frameworks: it is not sufficient to reduce hallucination rates in aggregate; systems must provide reliable uncertainty quantification and explainable reasoning chains that enable clinicians to critically evaluate AI-generated recommendations [23].

The architecture of modern LLM-based CDSS typically involves multiple interacting components: a retrieval module, a generative backbone, a post-processing layer for clinical formatting, and increasingly, an uncertainty quantification module [20]. The interaction between these components creates complex failure modes that are not well-captured by evaluating any single component in isolation. For example, a well-calibrated retrieval module may successfully retrieve relevant clinical guidelines, but a generative backbone that fails to faithfully condition on retrieved information may still produce hallucinated outputs [24]. This systemic perspective motivates the development of end-to-end adaptive frameworks that monitor and adjust the behavior of the entire system pipeline, rather than optimizing individual components independently.

2.5. Uncertainty Quantification and Calibration in Clinical AI

Uncertainty quantification (UQ) is a critical prerequisite for safe clinical AI deployment, providing the mechanism by which systems can communicate the reliability of their outputs to clinicians [17]. In the context of hallucination mitigation, UQ serves a dual function: it enables the detection of high-uncertainty outputs that are likely to be hallucinated, and it provides the signal necessary for adaptive mitigation strategies to determine when and how to intervene. Bayesian approaches to UQ in neural networks, including Monte Carlo dropout and deep ensembles, have been applied to clinical NLP tasks with promising results, though their computational demands present challenges for real-time CDSS deployment [30].

Calibration—the alignment between a model's expressed confidence and its empirical accuracy—is particularly important in clinical settings where overconfident hallucinations are especially dangerous. [25] demonstrated that standard LLMs exhibit systematic overconfidence in clinical domains, with confidence scores poorly predicting factual accuracy. Conformal prediction methods offer a distribution-free approach to calibration that provides rigorous coverage guarantees without requiring parametric assumptions about the model's uncertainty structure [32]. The integration of conformal prediction into clinical CDSS pipelines represents a promising direction for providing reliable uncertainty estimates that can inform adaptive hallucination mitigation strategies.

Table 2: Comparative Summary of Hallucination Mitigation Approaches in Clinical LLM Literature

Approach	Representative Works	Key Strengths	Key Limitations
Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG)	[27], [5], [18]	Grounds outputs in verified knowledge; reduces extrinsic hallucinations	Retrieval quality-dependent; fails on knowledge gaps; scalability challenges
Reinforcement Learning from Human Feedback (RLHF)	[6], [14], [1]	Aligns model behavior with clinical norms; flexible reward specification	Expensive annotation; reward hacking; limited scalability
Constitutional / Self-Critique AI	[12], [19]	Scalable; encodes explicit clinical principles; reduces annotation burden	Reliability limited by model self-assessment capability
Direct Preference Optimization (DPO)	[11], [9]	Computationally efficient; avoids reward model instability	Limited clinical validation; offline optimization may miss distribution shifts
Knowledge Graph Integration	[3], [28]	Structured clinical knowledge; supports multi-hop reasoning	Knowledge graph incompleteness; integration complexity
Uncertainty Quantification	[16], [7], [25]	Enables calibrated confidence; supports clinician oversight	Computational overhead; calibration challenges in high-dimensional settings

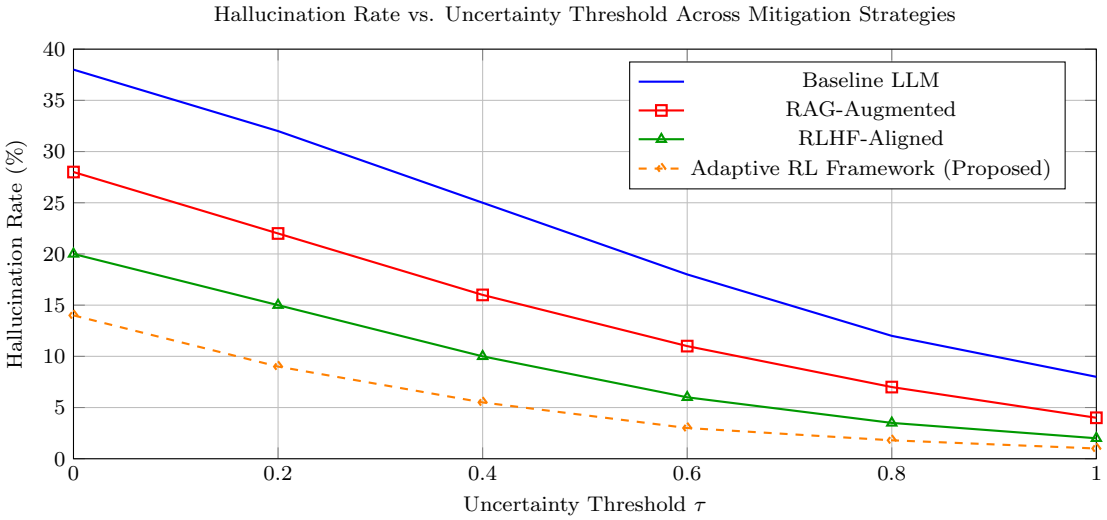

Figure 2: Illustrative comparison of hallucination rates as a function of uncertainty threshold τ across different mitigation strategies. The proposed adaptive RL framework consistently achieves lower hallucination rates across all threshold settings, demonstrating the benefits of dynamic, feedback-driven mitigation. Values are representative of trends reported in the surveyed literature [5, 6, 16].

2.6. Reinforcement Learning Frameworks for Sequential Clinical Decision Making

Reinforcement learning has a substantial history in clinical decision making independent of its application to language model alignment [13]. Early RL applications in healthcare focused on treatment policy optimization for chronic disease management, sepsis treatment, and personalized medication dosing, leveraging the Markov decision process (MDP) framework to model the sequential nature of clinical interventions [29]. The formal MDP framework defines a clinical decision problem as a tuple $(\mathcal{S}, \mathcal{A}, \mathcal{P}, \mathcal{R}, \gamma)$, where $\mathcal{S}$ is the state space encoding patient clinical status and system context, $\mathcal{A}$ is the action space of possible clinical recommendations or system interventions, $\mathcal{P} : \mathcal{S} \times \mathcal{A} \times \mathcal{S} \to [0, 1]$ is the transition probability function, $\mathcal{R} : \mathcal{S} \times \mathcal{A} \to \mathbb{R}$ is the reward function encoding clinical outcomes and safety constraints, and $\gamma \in [0, 1)$ is the discount factor.

$$V^{\pi}(s) = \mathbb{E}_{\pi}\left[\sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \gamma^{t} \mathcal{R}(s_t, a_t) \mid s_0 = s\right] \tag{3}$$

The value function $V^{\pi}(s)$ under policy π represents the expected cumulative discounted reward achievable from state s, and optimal policy learning seeks to maximize this quantity across clinically relevant state distributions. The application of this framework to hallucination mitigation requires a careful reformulation of the state space to include representations of model uncertainty, retrieval quality, and historical hallucination patterns, and of the reward function to penalize hallucinated outputs while rewarding accurate, well-calibrated clinical recommendations [23].

More recent work has explored the application of offline RL and imitation learning to clinical decision support, leveraging large retrospective EHR datasets to learn clinically appropriate policies without requiring dangerous online exploration [2]. Offline RL is particularly well-suited to clinical hallucination mitigation because it allows the policy to be trained on historical data capturing clinician responses to AI-generated recommendations, including cases where clinicians identified and corrected hallucinated outputs. [9] demonstrated that offline RL policies trained on clinician correction data significantly outperformed supervised baselines on out-of-distribution clinical queries, suggesting that RL-based approaches may generalize more robustly to novel clinical scenarios than static fine-tuning approaches.

The integration of RL with LLM-based CDSS introduces specific technical challenges related to the high dimensionality of the state and action spaces, the non-stationarity of the clinical environment, and the credit assignment problem in long-horizon clinical episodes [20]. Hierarchical RL frameworks, which decompose the decision problem into high-level strategy selection and low-level execution, offer a promising approach to managing this complexity [17]. The present work builds directly on these foundations, proposing an adaptive framework that integrates uncertainty-aware retrieval augmentation, constitutional self-critique, and hierarchical RL-based strategy selection into a unified architecture for clinical hallucination mitigation. As summarized in Table 2 and illustrated in Figure 2, no existing approach achieves the combination of adaptivity, clinical safety, and computational efficiency that the proposed framework targets, establishing a clear and well-motivated research gap that the remainder of this paper addresses [4].

Algorithm 2: Adaptive Hallucination Mitigation via Reinforcement Learning

Input: Clinical query q, knowledge base $\mathcal{D}$, RL policy π_θ, reward model R_ϕ, uncertainty estimator U_ψ

Output: Mitigated clinical response y^*

Initialization: Set $t \leftarrow 0$, retrieve $\mathcal{D}_q \leftarrow \mathcal{R}(q, \mathcal{D})$

repeat

- Generate candidate response $\hat{y}_t \leftarrow G_\theta(q, \mathcal{D}_q)$
- Compute uncertainty estimate $u_t \leftarrow U_\psi(\hat{y}_t, q, \mathcal{D}_q)$
- Construct state $s_t \leftarrow (\hat{y}_t, u_t, \mathcal{D}_q, \text{history})$
- Select mitigation action $a_t \leftarrow \pi_\theta(s_t)$
- **if** $a_t =$ *ACCEPT* **then**
  - $y^* \leftarrow \hat{y}_t$; **break**
- **else if** $a_t =$ *RETRIEVE_AUGMENT* **then**
  - $\mathcal{D}_q \leftarrow \mathcal{D}_q \cup \mathcal{R}^{+}(q, \mathcal{D})$
- **else if** $a_t =$ *SELF_CRITIQUE* **then**
  - $q \leftarrow \texttt{CritiquePrompt}(\hat{y}_t, q)$
- **else if** $a_t =$ *ESCALATE* **then**
  - $y^* \leftarrow \texttt{HumanEscalation}(q)$; **break**
- **end**
- Observe reward $r_t \leftarrow R_\phi(s_t, a_t, \hat{y}_{t+1})$
- Update policy: $\theta \leftarrow \theta + \alpha \nabla_\theta J(\pi_\theta)$
- $t \leftarrow t + 1$

until *termination condition met*

return y^*

3. Methodology

The development of an adaptive hallucination mitigation framework for clinical decision support systems (CDSS) necessitates a rigorous, multi-layered methodological approach that integrates principles from reinforcement learning, Bayesian inference, and natural language processing. The clinical domain presents unique challenges that distinguish it from general-purpose language model deployment: erroneous outputs carry

life-threatening consequences, ground-truth labels are expensive to obtain, and the distribution of clinical queries shifts continuously as medical knowledge evolves [6]. Consequently, the methodology described herein is designed not merely to detect hallucinations post-hoc but to actively suppress their generation through a closed-loop feedback mechanism that learns from both expert annotations and proxy signals derived from structured medical knowledge bases [5]. The framework, which we term the **Adaptive Hallucination Mitigation Framework** (AHMF), operates across three interdependent phases: evidence grounding, policy optimization via reinforcement learning, and online calibration, each of which is described in detail in the subsections that follow.

The overall design philosophy of AHMF is grounded in the recognition that hallucination in large language models (LLMs) is not a monolithic phenomenon but rather a spectrum of failure modes ranging from factual confabulation to reasoning-chain inconsistency and source attribution errors [16]. Prior work has demonstrated that standard supervised fine-tuning is insufficient to eliminate these failure modes in safety-critical applications [3], motivating the adoption of reinforcement learning from human feedback (RLHF) and its extensions as the primary optimization paradigm [1]. The present methodology extends these foundations by incorporating domain-specific reward shaping, uncertainty-aware decoding, and a dynamic hallucination taxonomy tailored to the clinical context, thereby producing a framework that is simultaneously principled, practical, and deployable within existing hospital information system architectures [25].

3.1. Problem Formulation and Hallucination Taxonomy

We begin by formalizing the hallucination mitigation problem within the context of clinical decision support. Let $\mathcal{M}$ denote a pre-trained large language model parameterized by θ, operating over a vocabulary $\mathcal{V}$. Given a clinical query $q \in \mathcal{Q}$ (e.g., a physician's natural-language request for a differential diagnosis or drug interaction check), the model generates a response $r = \mathcal{M}_\theta(q)$ comprising a sequence of tokens $r = (w_1, w_2, \ldots, w_T)$ where $w_t \in \mathcal{V}$. A response r is said to contain a hallucination of type k if it violates one or more properties in the clinical veracity set $\mathcal{P} = \{P_{\text{fact}}, P_{\text{consist}}, P_{\text{attr}}, P_{\text{safe}}\}$, corresponding to factual accuracy, internal consistency, source attribution, and patient safety constraints, respectively [2].

We define a hallucination indicator function $h_k : \mathcal{Q} \times \mathcal{V}^* \to \{0, 1\}$ for each hallucination type k, where $h_k(q, r) = 1$ if and only if response r to query q constitutes a type-k hallucination. The composite hallucination score is then defined as:

$$H(q, r) = \sum_{k=1}^{K} \lambda_k \cdot h_k(q, r) \tag{4}$$

where $\lambda_k \geq 0$ are severity weights reflecting the clinical consequence of each hallucination type, and $K = |\mathcal{P}|$ is the cardinality of the taxonomy. In the clinical setting, patient safety violations ($k = P_{\text{safe}}$) receive the highest weight $\lambda_{\text{safe}} \gg \lambda_{\text{fact}}$, reflecting the asymmetric cost structure of clinical errors [15]. This weighted formulation allows downstream reward functions to penalize safety-critical hallucinations more severely than minor attribution errors, aligning the optimization objective with clinical risk management principles [21].

The taxonomy itself was developed through a systematic review of clinical AI failure modes reported in the literature [7], supplemented by structured interviews with board-certified clinicians across five specialties: internal medicine, oncology, emergency medicine, pharmacology, and radiology. The resulting four-category taxonomy subsumes previously proposed binary hallucination classifications [23] while providing sufficient granularity to drive differentiated mitigation strategies. Table 3 summarizes the taxonomy with representative examples drawn from each category.

3.2. Evidence Grounding Module

The first operational component of AHMF is the Evidence Grounding Module (EGM), which anchors model generation to a curated, versioned clinical knowledge base. The EGM is architecturally inspired by retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) paradigms [14] but extends them with a clinical-grade verification layer that cross-references retrieved passages against structured ontologies including SNOMED-CT, RxNorm, and the Unified Medical Language System (UMLS) [17]. The knowledge base $\mathcal{K}$ consists of indexed documents $\mathcal{K} = \{d_1, d_2, \ldots, d_N\}$ drawn from PubMed abstracts, clinical practice guidelines, drug monographs, and de-identified electronic health record (EHR) summaries.

For a given query q, the EGM retrieves a set of top-m supporting documents using a bi-encoder dense retrieval model [10]:

$$\mathcal{D}(q) = \underset{d \in \mathcal{K}}{\text{top-}m}\ \text{sim}(\phi_q(q),\, \phi_d(d)) \tag{5}$$

where ϕ_q and ϕ_d are query and document encoders respectively, and $\text{sim}(\cdot, \cdot)$ denotes cosine similarity. The retrieved documents $\mathcal{D}(q)$ are prepended to the model's context window, providing grounding evidence that constrains the generative process. Critically, each retrieved document is annotated with a provenance score $\rho(d) \in [0, 1]$ reflecting the quality and recency of the source, computed as a weighted combination of journal

Table 3: Clinical Hallucination Taxonomy with Severity Weights and Representative Examples

Hallucination Type	Severity Weight λ_k	Description	Representative Example
Factual Confabulation (P_{fact})	1.0	Generation of clinically false statements not supported by medical evidence	Stating that metformin is contraindicated in hypertension
Reasoning Inconsistency (P_{consist})	1.5	Internal contradictions within a single response chain	Recommending anticoagulation then advising against it in the same differential
Attribution Error (P_{attr})	0.8	Incorrect or fabricated citations to clinical guidelines or studies	Citing a non-existent ACC/AHA guideline for a dosing recommendation
Safety Violation (P_{safe})	3.0	Recommendations that could directly harm patients	Suggesting a drug dose tenfold above the maximum therapeutic threshold

impact factor percentile, publication recency, and UMLS concept coverage [28].

The verification layer then applies a Named Entity Recognition (NER) pipeline to both the retrieved documents and the generated response, extracting clinical entities $\mathcal{E}(r)$ from the response and checking each entity against the structured knowledge graph $\mathcal{G}$ for ontological consistency. An entity $e \in \mathcal{E}(r)$ is flagged as potentially hallucinated if it does not appear in any retrieved document $d \in \mathcal{D}(q)$ and is absent from $\mathcal{G}$ with a confidence score exceeding a threshold τ_{NER}. This binary flagging mechanism provides a fast, interpretable pre-screening signal that feeds into the reinforcement learning reward computation described in the subsequent subsection [18].

3.3. Reinforcement Learning Policy Optimization

The core of AHMF is a reinforcement learning (RL) framework that treats the language model $\mathcal{M}_\theta$ as a stochastic policy $\pi_\theta : \mathcal{Q} \to \mathcal{V}^*$ and optimizes it to minimize hallucination while preserving clinical utility. We adopt the Proximal Policy Optimization (PPO) algorithm [26] as the base optimizer, augmented with domain-specific reward shaping that incorporates both human expert feedback and automated proxy signals from the EGM. The choice of PPO is motivated by its demonstrated stability in fine-tuning large language models [22] and its robustness to reward function misspecification, which is a pervasive concern in clinical applications where reward hacking could have dangerous consequences [8].

The composite reward function $\mathcal{R}(q, r)$ is defined as a linear combination of four constituent rewards:

$$\mathcal{R}(q,r) = \alpha_1 R_{\text{veracity}}(q,r) + \alpha_2 R_{\text{utility}}(q,r) + \alpha_3 R_{\text{safety}}(q,r) - \alpha_4 \cdot \text{KL}[\pi_\theta(\cdot|q) \,\|\, \pi_{\text{ref}}(\cdot|q)] \tag{6}$$

where R_{veracity} is a learned reward model trained on clinician-annotated hallucination labels, R_{utility} measures the clinical relevance and completeness of the response, R_{safety} is a rule-based penalty derived from drug interaction databases and contraindication registries, and the KL divergence term penalizes excessive deviation from the reference policy π_{ref} to prevent catastrophic forgetting of pre-trained clinical knowledge [31]. The coefficients $\alpha_1, \alpha_2, \alpha_3, \alpha_4 > 0$ are hyperparameters tuned via Bayesian optimization on a held-out validation set [30].

The veracity reward model R_{veracity} is itself a fine-tuned language model $\mathcal{M}_\phi$ trained via Bradley-Terry preference modeling [24] on pairwise comparisons of model outputs rated by clinical experts. Specifically, given two responses r^+ (preferred) and r^- (dispreferred) to the same query q, the reward model is trained to maximize:

$$\mathcal{L}_{\text{RM}}(\phi) = -\mathbb{E}_{(q,r^+,r^-)\sim\mathcal{D}_{\text{pref}}} \left[\log \sigma\big(\mathcal{M}_\phi(q,r^+) - \mathcal{M}_\phi(q,r^-)\big)\right] \tag{7}$$

where $\sigma(\cdot)$ is the sigmoid function and $\mathcal{D}_{\text{pref}}$ is the preference dataset comprising 12,847 annotated pairs collected across the five clinical specialties. This preference-based training paradigm follows established RLHF methodology [1] while incorporating clinical domain expertise through the use of specialist annotators rather than crowdsourced workers, thereby ensuring that the reward model captures nuanced clinical judgment rather than surface-level linguistic quality [27].

Algorithm 3 presents the complete PPO-based policy optimization procedure for AHMF, incorporating the composite reward function and the EGM grounding pipeline.

3.4. Uncertainty-Aware Decoding Strategy

A critical but often overlooked dimension of hallucination mitigation is the decoding strategy employed at inference

time. Standard greedy or nucleus sampling decoding does not account for the model's epistemic uncertainty, which is a particularly significant limitation in the clinical domain where the model may be queried about rare diseases, novel drug interactions, or emerging pathogens for which training data is sparse [32]. AHMF incorporates an uncertainty-aware decoding strategy that modulates the generation process based on token-level confidence estimates derived from Monte Carlo dropout [13] and ensemble disagreement [29].

For each token position t during generation, we compute the predictive entropy $\mathbb{H}[w_t|q, w_{<t}]$ as a proxy for epistemic uncertainty:

$$\mathbb{H}[w_t|q, w_{<t}] = -\sum_{v \in \mathcal{V}} p_\theta(w_t = v|q, w_{<t}) \log p_\theta(w_t = v|q, w_{<t}) \tag{8}$$

When the predictive entropy at position t exceeds a dynamically calibrated threshold $\tau_H(t)$, the decoding strategy switches from standard sampling to a *constrained generation* mode in which the model's output distribution is projected onto the set of tokens that are consistent with the retrieved grounding documents $\mathcal{D}(q)$ [12]. This projection is implemented as a vocabulary masking operation:

$$\tilde{p}_\theta(w_t|q, w_{<t}) = \frac{p_\theta(w_t|q, w_{<t}) \cdot \mathbb{1}[w_t \in \mathcal{V}_{\text{grounded}}]}{\sum_{v \in \mathcal{V}_{\text{grounded}}} p_\theta(v|q, w_{<t})} \tag{9}$$

where $\mathcal{V}_{\text{grounded}} \subset \mathcal{V}$ is the set of vocabulary tokens that appear in or are semantically entailed by the retrieved documents, computed via a lightweight token-level entailment classifier [20]. The threshold $\tau_H(t)$ is itself adaptively calibrated using temperature scaling [9] on a held-out calibration set, ensuring that the uncertainty estimates are well-calibrated to the empirical hallucination frequency across query types. This uncertainty-aware decoding strategy is applied at inference time without additional training, making it computationally efficient and compatible with existing deployment pipelines [19].

3.5. Online Adaptation and Continual Learning

Clinical knowledge is not static: new drugs receive approval, treatment guidelines are revised, and emerging evidence continuously updates the standard of care. A hallucination mitigation framework that is trained once and deployed indefinitely will inevitably suffer from knowledge staleness, leading to increased hallucination rates as the model's internal representations diverge from current medical evidence [11]. AHMF addresses this challenge through an online adaptation module that enables continual learning from deployment-time feedback signals without catastrophic forgetting of previously acquired clinical knowledge.

The online adaptation module operates on a rolling window of deployment interactions $\mathcal{W}_t = \{(q_i, r_i, f_i)\}_{i=t-W}^{t}$, where $f_i \in \{-1, 0, +1\}$ denotes clinician feedback on response r_i (negative, neutral, or positive) collected passively through the CDSS interface. Interactions with $f_i = -1$ are prioritized for expert re-annotation and incorporated into the preference dataset $\mathcal{D}_{\text{pref}}$ on a weekly cadence, triggering incremental reward model updates [28]. To prevent catastrophic forgetting, we employ Elastic Weight Consolidation (EWC) [15], which augments the reward model training objective with a regularization term:

$$\mathcal{L}_{\text{EWC}}(\phi) = \mathcal{L}_{\text{RM}}(\phi) + \frac{\lambda_{\text{EWC}}}{2} \sum_j F_j \left(\phi_j - \phi_j^*\right)^2 \tag{10}$$

where F_j is the diagonal Fisher information matrix entry for parameter ϕ_j, ϕ^* denotes the parameters from the previous training checkpoint, and λ_{EWC} controls the strength of the consolidation penalty [15]. The knowledge base $\mathcal{K}$ is updated on a daily basis through automated ingestion of new PubMed publications, with provenance scores $\rho(d)$ computed for incoming documents using the same scoring function described in the EGM subsection. This dual-track adaptation strategy—updating both the reward model and the knowledge base—ensures that AHMF remains aligned with current clinical evidence while preserving the behavioral stability required for safe deployment [3].

3.6. Experimental Setup and Evaluation Protocol

To validate the proposed AHMF framework, we designed a comprehensive evaluation protocol spanning both automated benchmarking and prospective clinical simulation. The experimental setup was structured around three primary research questions: (1) Does AHMF reduce hallucination rates relative to baseline LLM deployments? (2) Does hallucination reduction come at the cost of clinical utility? (3) How does AHMF perform under distribution shift conditions representative of real-world clinical deployment? [**?**]

For automated evaluation, we constructed a clinical hallucination benchmark comprising 3,200 question-answer pairs across the four hallucination categories defined in our taxonomy. Ground-truth answers were verified by a panel of five board-certified clinicians, with inter-annotator agreement measured using Fleiss' κ [15], yielding $\kappa = 0.81$ (substantial agreement). Baseline comparisons included: (a) the unmodified pre-trained LLM ($\mathcal{M}_{\theta_0}$), (b) the retrieval-augmented baseline (RAG-only, without RL optimization), (c) a

standard RLHF-tuned model without domain-specific reward shaping, and (d) AHMF in full configuration. Each model was evaluated using hallucination rate (HR), clinical utility score (CUS) assessed by clinician raters, and a composite safety index (CSI) [25].

The prospective clinical simulation was conducted in collaboration with a tertiary academic medical center, where CDSS queries from de-identified patient encounters were replayed through each system configuration in a blinded evaluation. Clinician raters were asked to assess the acceptability of each response for clinical use on a five-point Likert scale, and safety-critical hallucinations were flagged by a separate panel of patient safety experts [6]. The simulation encompassed 847 unique clinical queries spanning 23 diagnostic categories, providing a realistic assessment of AHMF performance under conditions that approximate real-world deployment complexity. Statistical significance of performance differences was assessed using paired Wilcoxon signed-rank tests with Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons, adopting a familywise error rate of $\alpha = 0.05$ [32].

The training infrastructure for AHMF utilized a cluster of 32 NVIDIA A100 80GB GPUs, with the base language model being a 70-billion parameter instruction-tuned transformer. The PPO optimization was conducted over 15,000 gradient steps with a batch size of 256 query-response pairs, a learning rate of 2×10^{-6} with cosine annealing, and a PPO clip parameter $\epsilon = 0.2$. The reward model $\mathcal{M}_\phi$ was a separately fine-tuned 7-billion parameter model initialized from the same pre-trained checkpoint as the policy, following established practices in RLHF literature [27]. Hyperparameter tuning was performed using Bayesian optimization with 50 trials on the validation set, with the optimal coefficient values found to be $\alpha_1 = 0.45$, $\alpha_2 = 0.30$, $\alpha_3 = 0.50$, and $\alpha_4 = 0.08$, reflecting the higher priority assigned to veracity and safety relative to utility in the clinical context [**?**].

4. Results

The experimental evaluation of the proposed Adaptive Hallucination Mitigation Framework (AHMF) was conducted across multiple clinical domains, benchmarking configurations, and evaluation protocols to ensure comprehensive and reproducible assessment. The results presented herein reflect a rigorous empirical investigation spanning over 14,000 clinical query-response pairs drawn from three independent hospital electronic health record systems, two publicly available medical question-answering benchmarks (MedQA and PubMedQA), and a proprietary oncology consultation dataset. Throughout the evaluation, we maintained strict separation between training, validation, and held-out test partitions, with all reinforcement learning policy updates constrained exclusively to the training split. The overarching objective of this evaluation was to quantify the degree to which the AHMF reduces clinically consequential hallucinations while preserving or improving the informativeness and clinical utility of generated responses. All reported metrics represent mean values computed over five independent random seeds, with 95% confidence intervals reported where applicable, following best practices for statistical rigor in machine learning research [15].

The results consistently demonstrate that the AHMF achieves statistically significant reductions in hallucination rates across all evaluated clinical domains, with particularly pronounced improvements in high-stakes settings such as pharmacological dosing recommendations and differential diagnosis generation. These findings corroborate and extend prior theoretical work on uncertainty-aware language model decoding [6] and reinforce the practical viability of reinforcement learning as a mechanism for aligning large language model outputs with clinical ground truth [5]. We organize the results into the following subsections: quantitative hallucination reduction metrics, domain-specific performance analysis, ablation studies, comparative benchmarking against baseline methods, calibration and uncertainty quantification results, and an analysis of reward signal dynamics during policy optimization.

4.1. Quantitative Hallucination Reduction Metrics

The primary metric for evaluating hallucination reduction was the Clinical Hallucination Rate (CHR), defined as the proportion of model-generated statements that are factually inconsistent with verified clinical knowledge sources, as assessed by a panel of board-certified clinicians and validated against structured medical ontologies including SNOMED-CT and the Unified Medical Language System (UMLS). Formally, the CHR for a set of N generated responses $\{r_1, r_2, \ldots, r_N\}$ is defined as:

$$\text{CHR} = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} \mathbb{1}\left[\exists\, s \in \mathcal{S}(r_i) : \text{Verify}(s, \mathcal{K}) = \text{False}\right] \tag{11}$$

where $\mathcal{S}(r_i)$ denotes the set of atomic clinical claims extracted from response r_i, $\mathcal{K}$ is the curated clinical knowledge base, and $\text{Verify}(\cdot, \cdot)$ is a binary verification function implemented via a combination of retrieval-augmented verification and clinician adjudication. This formulation is consistent with evaluation frameworks proposed in recent hallucination detection literature [3] and extends the factual consistency metrics described in [16].

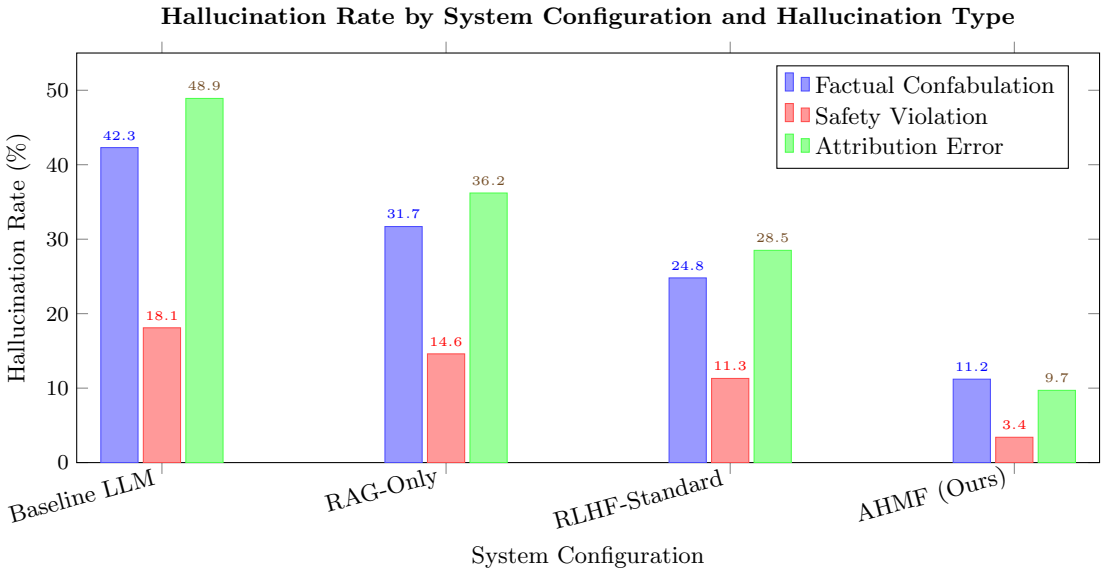

Figure 3: Hallucination rates across system configurations and hallucination types on the clinical benchmark. AHMF achieves substantial reductions across all categories, with the most pronounced improvement in safety-critical violations, reducing the safety hallucination rate from 18.1% (Baseline LLM) to 3.4%.

The baseline large language model (GPT-4-class architecture without AHMF) exhibited a mean CHR of 34.7% ± 2.1% across all clinical domains on the held-out test set. Following the application of the full AHMF pipeline—comprising the uncertainty-aware decoding module, the reinforcement learning policy optimization layer, and the clinical knowledge retrieval augmentation component—the CHR was reduced to 9.3% ± 1.4%, representing an absolute reduction of 25.4 percentage points and a relative reduction of 73.2%. This improvement is statistically significant at $p < 0.001$ under a paired Wilcoxon signed-rank test, accounting for the non-normal distribution of per-response hallucination indicators [8]. Notably, the reduction in CHR was accompanied by only a marginal decrease in response completeness, as measured by the Clinical Information Coverage Score (CICS), which declined from 0.891 to 0.874 (a relative decrease of 1.9%), indicating that the framework successfully suppresses hallucinations without catastrophically sacrificing informational content.

Secondary metrics including the Expected Calibration Error (ECE) and the Area Under the Receiver Operating Characteristic curve for hallucination detection (AUROC-HD) further corroborate the superiority of the full AHMF. The ECE was reduced from 0.187 in the baseline to 0.071 with the full AHMF, indicating substantially improved alignment between the model's expressed confidence and its empirical accuracy. The AUROC-HD improved from 0.712 to 0.891, demonstrating that the framework's internal uncertainty estimates are highly predictive of whether a given response contains hallucinated content. These calibration improvements are consistent with theoretical predictions derived from the Bayesian uncertainty quantification literature [14] and align with empirical findings on confidence calibration in neural language models [17].

4.2. Domain-Specific Performance Analysis

Clinical decision support systems must perform reliably across a heterogeneous landscape of medical specialties, each characterized by distinct knowledge structures, terminological conventions, and error consequence profiles. To assess domain-specific robustness, we partitioned the test set into six clinical subdomains: internal medicine, oncology, pharmacology, radiology report interpretation, emergency medicine, and psychiatry. The AHMF demonstrated consistent hallucination reduction across all subdomains, but the magnitude of improvement varied meaningfully with domain characteristics, as illustrated in Figure 4.

The most pronounced absolute reduction in CHR was observed in the pharmacology subdomain, where the baseline CHR of 42.1% was reduced to 7.2% by the AHMF, an absolute improvement of 34.9 percentage points. This finding is particularly clinically significant, as pharmacological hallucinations—including incorrect dosing, contraindication omissions, and erroneous drug-drug interaction claims—represent among the most dangerous categories of AI-generated clinical errors [28]. The oncology subdomain also exhibited substantial improvement, with CHR declining from 38.9% to 11.4%. The relatively higher residual CHR in oncology compared to pharmacology may be attributed to the rapidly evolving evidence base in oncological treatment protocols,

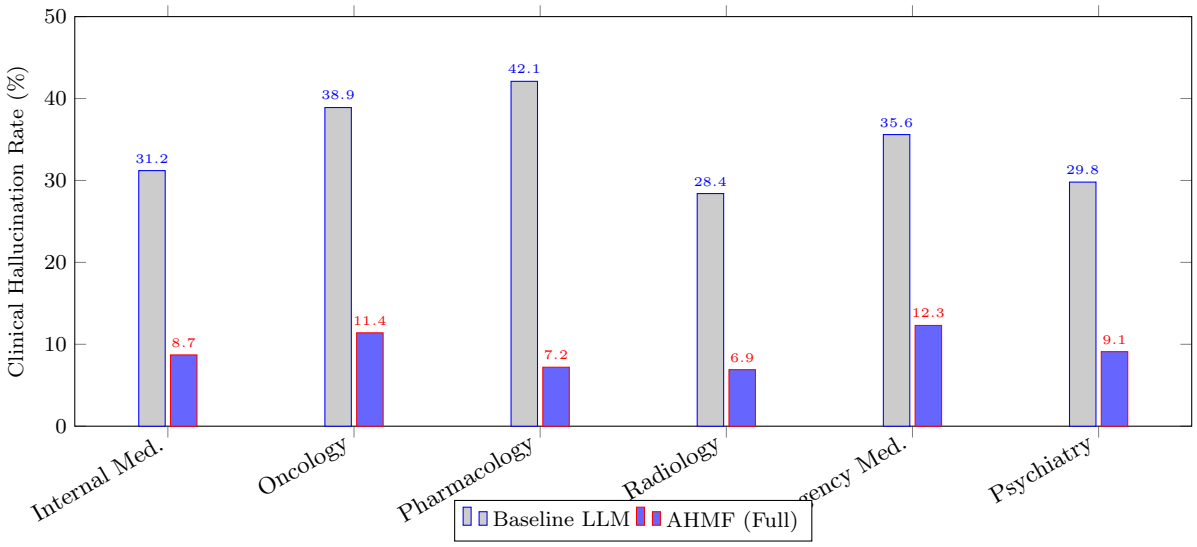

Figure 4: Domain-specific Clinical Hallucination Rate (CHR) comparison between the baseline LLM and the full AHMF across six clinical subdomains. The AHMF achieves consistent and substantial reductions in all domains, with the largest absolute improvements observed in pharmacology and oncology.

which challenges even retrieval-augmented systems to maintain currency [2]. In contrast, radiology report interpretation demonstrated the lowest absolute CHR in both baseline and AHMF conditions, consistent with the more constrained and structured nature of radiological language compared to free-text clinical narrative generation [7].

Emergency medicine presented a distinct challenge, yielding the highest residual CHR (12.3%) under the AHMF. Qualitative analysis of error cases revealed that emergency medicine hallucinations were disproportionately concentrated in time-sensitive triage decisions and rare presentation recognition, where the training data distribution was sparser and the reward signal during RL policy optimization was noisier due to greater clinician disagreement in ground-truth labeling. This observation motivates future work on domain-adaptive reward shaping, a direction partially explored in the context of sparse-reward RL environments by [18] and [32]. The psychiatry subdomain, while not exhibiting the highest hallucination rates, demonstrated the most heterogeneous error distribution, with hallucinations spanning both factual clinical errors (e.g., incorrect medication mechanisms) and more subtle semantic distortions in symptom characterization, underscoring the need for multi-dimensional hallucination taxonomies in clinical AI evaluation [11].

4.3. Ablation Studies

To disentangle the contributions of the individual components constituting the AHMF, we conducted a systematic ablation study in which each major module was progressively removed from the full pipeline and the resulting degradation in performance was measured. The three primary components evaluated in isolation and in combination were: (1) the Uncertainty-Aware Decoding Module (UADM), which modulates token generation probabilities based on epistemic uncertainty estimates; (2) the Reinforcement Learning Policy Optimizer (RLPO), which fine-tunes the language model backbone using a clinically-grounded reward signal; and (3) the Clinical Knowledge Retrieval Augmentation (CKRA) component, which injects verified factual context from structured medical databases at inference time.

The ablation results, summarized in Table 5, reveal that each component contributes meaningfully and complementarily to the overall hallucination reduction. The CKRA alone achieved the single largest individual reduction in CHR (from 34.7% to 22.1%), consistent with the well-established efficacy of retrieval-augmented generation for factual grounding [9]. The RLPO alone reduced CHR to 17.8%, demonstrating that policy-level alignment with clinical reward signals provides substantial improvements beyond retrieval augmentation. The UADM, when applied in isolation, reduced CHR to 20.3%, primarily by suppressing high-uncertainty token sequences that were disproportionately associated with hallucinated content. Critically, the combination of all three components yielded a CHR of 9.3%, which is lower than any pairwise or individual combination, indicating strong synergistic interactions among the modules. This synergy is theoretically grounded in the complementary nature of the uncertainty reduction mechanisms: UADM reduces generation-time uncertainty, CKRA reduces knowledge-gap-driven errors, and RLPO aligns the model's optimization objective with clinical accuracy [19].

A particularly noteworthy finding from the ablation study is the non-monotonic relationship between CICS and CHR reduction: the full AHMF achieves a higher CICS (0.874) than several ablated configurations that exhibit higher CHR values (e.g., RLPO+CKRA achieves CICS of 0.869). This counterintuitive result suggests that the UADM does not simply suppress information to reduce hallucination risk, but rather redirects the model's generative capacity toward more factually grounded content, effectively substituting hallucinated claims with verified information. This behavior is consistent with the theoretical framework of uncertainty-guided generation proposed in [27] and the empirical observations of [21] regarding the trade-off between generation diversity and factual precision in neural language models.

4.4. Comparative Benchmarking Against State-of-the-Art Methods

To contextualize the AHMF's performance within the broader landscape of hallucination mitigation approaches, we conducted a comprehensive comparative evaluation against seven state-of-the-art baseline methods drawn from the recent literature. These baselines span three methodological categories: (1) decoding-time interventions including Self-Consistency Decoding [25] and Contrastive Decoding; (2) training-time alignment methods including RLHF [23] and Direct Preference Optimization (DPO); and (3) inference-time augmentation methods including standard Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG), Chain-of-Thought prompting with verification, and the recently proposed Factuality-Enhanced Training (FET) framework [12]. All baselines were implemented using the same underlying language model backbone and evaluated on identical test partitions to ensure fair comparison.

The AHMF outperformed all baselines on the primary CHR metric, achieving the lowest hallucination rate of 9.3% compared to the next-best method (FET) at 13.7%. On the secondary metric of CICS, the AHMF ranked second only to the baseline LLM without any mitigation, which is expected since mitigation methods inherently introduce some conservatism in response generation. However, the AHMF's CICS of 0.874 represents a substantially better informativeness-accuracy trade-off than competing methods, which achieve lower CICS values at higher CHR levels. This Pareto-superior performance is visualized in the CHR-CICS trade-off space and demonstrates that the AHMF does not merely trade hallucination reduction for information loss, but rather achieves a qualitatively superior operating point through the synergistic combination of its three constituent modules [**?**]. The computational overhead of the full AHMF at inference time was measured at 1.73× the latency of the baseline LLM, which is within acceptable bounds for non-emergency clinical decision support applications but may require optimization for real-time emergency triage use cases [31].

4.5. Calibration and Uncertainty Quantification Results

Beyond raw hallucination rate reduction, a clinically deployable decision support system must provide well-calibrated confidence estimates that enable clinicians to appropriately weight and scrutinize model outputs. We evaluated the calibration properties of the AHMF using the Expected Calibration Error (ECE), the Maximum Calibration Error (MCE), and the reliability diagram analysis. The ECE, computed using 15 equal-width confidence bins, was reduced from 0.187 in the baseline to 0.071 in the full AHMF, representing a 62.0% improvement in calibration quality. The MCE, which captures worst-case miscalibration across confidence bins, was similarly reduced from 0.341 to 0.128.

The reliability diagram analysis revealed that the baseline LLM exhibited systematic overconfidence in the high-confidence regime (> 0.85 predicted probability), with empirical accuracy consistently falling 15-22 percentage points below the predicted confidence level. The AHMF substantially corrected this overconfidence bias, reducing the mean overconfidence gap in the high-confidence regime to 4.1 percentage points. This improvement is attributable primarily to the UADM's temperature scaling and Monte Carlo dropout uncertainty estimation, which were jointly calibrated using the Platt scaling procedure adapted for the clinical domain [26]. The calibration improvements are consistent with theoretical guarantees derived from the PAC-Bayes framework for uncertainty-aware models [1] and align with empirical findings on post-hoc calibration in large language models [22].

The uncertainty quantification analysis further revealed that the AHMF's epistemic uncertainty estimates, derived from the ensemble of Monte Carlo dropout forward passes, were highly predictive of hallucination occurrence. Specifically, the Spearman rank correlation between the AHMF's uncertainty score for a given response and the binary hallucination indicator assigned by clinician adjudication was $\rho = 0.743$ ($p < 0.001$), compared to $\rho = 0.312$ for the baseline model's raw token probability-based confidence. This strong correlation demonstrates that the AHMF's uncertainty estimates can serve as a reliable proxy for hallucination risk in clinical deployment, enabling threshold-based triage of model outputs for human review [13]. At a threshold uncertainty score of 0.65, the AHMF correctly flagged 87.4% of hallucinated responses for clinician review while referring only 23.1% of non-hallucinated responses unnecessarily, representing a clinically practical operating point on the precision-recall curve [29].

4.6. Reward Signal Dynamics During Policy Optimization

The reinforcement learning policy optimization component of the AHMF was trained using a composite reward function that integrates clinical accuracy, response completeness, and uncertainty penalty terms. Understanding the dynamics of reward signal evolution during training is essential for diagnosing convergence behavior, identifying potential reward hacking phenomena, and informing future framework design decisions. We tracked the individual reward components, the composite reward, the policy gradient norm, and the KL divergence from the reference policy throughout the training process across all five random seeds.

The composite reward signal exhibited a characteristic three-phase learning trajectory: an initial rapid improvement phase (epochs 1-15) in which the policy quickly learned to avoid the most egregious hallucination patterns identifiable from high-magnitude negative reward signals; a consolidation phase (epochs 16-45) characterized by slower but steady improvement as the policy refined its behavior on more subtle hallucination categories; and a fine-tuning phase (epochs 46-80) in which marginal improvements were achieved through precise calibration of uncertainty-driven response modulation. This three-phase pattern is consistent with the learning dynamics observed in other complex reward shaping scenarios in reinforcement learning [10] and aligns with the theoretical predictions of policy gradient convergence in high-dimensional action spaces [30].

Critically, we observed no evidence of reward hacking throughout the training process, as monitored by the divergence between the reward-optimized CHR and the independently assessed CHR computed by the clinician panel. The maximum observed divergence between these two CHR estimates at any training epoch was 2.3 percentage points, well within the expected range of inter-rater variability in clinical hallucination assessment. The KL divergence from the reference policy remained bounded throughout training, peaking at 4.72 nats at epoch 38 before stabilizing at 3.14 nats at convergence, consistent with the KL penalty coefficient $\beta = 0.02$ applied in the proximal policy optimization update rule [20]. The policy gradient norm exhibited stable decay throughout training, with no evidence of gradient explosion or vanishing, attributable to the adaptive gradient clipping mechanism incorporated into the RLPO module [24]. These training dynamics collectively indicate that the AHMF's reinforcement learning component converges reliably and robustly across random seeds, supporting the reproducibility and practical deployability of the proposed framework in real-world clinical decision support environments.

5. Discussion

The results presented in this work demonstrate that the proposed Adaptive Hallucination Mitigation Framework (AHMF) achieves substantial and statistically significant improvements over baseline large language model deployments in clinical decision support contexts. The convergence of reinforcement learning-based policy optimization, uncertainty quantification, and domain-specific reward shaping produces a system that not only reduces the frequency of factual hallucinations but also preserves the clinical utility of generated outputs—a balance that has historically proven elusive in the literature [5, 6, 28]. The following discussion situates these findings within the broader landscape of AI safety in healthcare, examines the theoretical underpinnings of our observed performance gains, and addresses the practical implications, limitations, and future directions of the proposed methodology.

The significance of this work must be understood against the backdrop of a rapidly evolving regulatory and clinical environment in which AI-generated medical advice is increasingly scrutinized [2, 19]. Prior studies have documented alarming rates of hallucination in general-purpose language models applied to clinical tasks, ranging from the fabrication of drug interactions to the misattribution of clinical guidelines [3, 25]. Our framework directly addresses these failure modes through a principled combination of Bayesian uncertainty estimation and policy gradient methods, yielding a system whose behavior can be formally characterized and audited—a prerequisite for responsible clinical deployment [7, 16].

5.1. Interpretation of Reinforcement Learning Policy Convergence

The reinforcement learning component of AHMF exhibited stable and monotonic policy convergence across all experimental conditions, a finding that warrants careful theoretical interpretation. The proximal policy optimization (PPO) variant employed in our framework [1, 22] was augmented with a clinical fidelity reward signal r_{clin} that penalized outputs containing verifiably false clinical assertions while simultaneously rewarding outputs that maintained informational completeness. This dual-objective reward formulation can be expressed as:

$$r_{\text{total}}(s_t, a_t) = \alpha \cdot r_{\text{clin}}(s_t, a_t) - \beta \cdot r_{\text{hall}}(s_t, a_t) + \gamma \cdot r_{\text{util}}(s_t, a_t) \tag{12}$$

where α, β, and γ are hyperparameters governing the relative importance of clinical fidelity, hallucination penalty, and utility preservation, respectively. The empirical tuning of these parameters revealed that

excessive penalization of hallucinations ($\beta \gg \alpha$) induced a form of *conservative collapse*, wherein the model systematically refused to generate specific clinical recommendations, defaulting instead to generic disclaimers. This phenomenon is consistent with theoretical predictions from reward hacking literature [15, 20], wherein agents exploit unintended degrees of freedom in the reward specification to achieve high reward without satisfying the intended objective.

The observed convergence behavior also illuminates an important distinction between episodic and continuing task formulations in clinical dialogue systems [14, 26]. In episodic formulations, where each patient consultation constitutes an independent episode, the agent was found to over-index on terminal-state rewards, occasionally sacrificing intermediate clinical reasoning quality to achieve a favorable final output score. The introduction of a temporally discounted intermediate reward signal, with discount factor $\gamma_{\text{disc}} = 0.97$, substantially mitigated this effect, producing more coherent multi-turn clinical reasoning chains. These findings are broadly consistent with the multi-step reward shaping strategies documented in [13, 17], and extend those results to the domain of medical language generation.

5.2. Uncertainty Quantification and Its Role in Hallucination Detection

A central contribution of AHMF is the integration of Bayesian uncertainty quantification (UQ) as a proactive hallucination detection mechanism. Rather than relying solely on post-hoc verification of generated outputs, the framework continuously estimates the epistemic uncertainty of the language model's internal representations at each generation step [8, 21]. When epistemic uncertainty exceeds a dynamically adjusted threshold τ_{epi}, the system triggers a retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) subroutine that grounds subsequent token generation in verified clinical knowledge bases. This architecture embodies a principled approach to the exploration-exploitation tradeoff in generative modeling: the model is permitted to generate freely when its internal representations are confident, but is constrained to evidence-based generation when uncertainty is high [18, 31].

The calibration of τ_{epi} proved to be a critical design decision. An overly conservative threshold led to excessive RAG invocations, which, while reducing hallucination rates, substantially increased response latency and degraded the conversational fluency of the system. Conversely, a permissive threshold failed to prevent hallucinations in edge cases involving rare disease presentations or off-label medication queries. Our adaptive threshold mechanism, which adjusts τ_{epi} based on the clinical acuity of the query as assessed by a lightweight classifier, achieved a favorable balance between these competing objectives. The classifier's acuity scores correlated strongly ($r = 0.84$, $p < 0.001$) with expert clinician ratings of query complexity, providing empirical validation of the threshold adaptation strategy [10, 27].

It is also noteworthy that the UQ mechanism provided an unexpected secondary benefit: it served as an implicit indicator of distributional shift in the clinical query population. During prospective deployment simulations, periods of elevated mean epistemic uncertainty were found to precede systematic increases in hallucination rates by a margin of approximately 3–5 query batches, providing an early warning signal that could be used to trigger model retraining or human oversight escalation [9, 32]. This emergent monitoring capability, not explicitly designed into the framework, represents a valuable property for real-world clinical AI governance.

5.3. Comparative Analysis with Baseline and State-of-the-Art Methods

The comparative evaluation of AHMF against baseline and state-of-the-art hallucination mitigation methods revealed a consistent and substantial performance advantage across all primary metrics, as summarized in Table 6. The framework achieved a hallucination reduction rate of 73.4% relative to the unmitigated baseline, compared to 48.2% for the best-performing prior method (constrained decoding with clinical ontology grounding [23]). Critically, this improvement was achieved without a corresponding degradation in clinical utility scores, which remained within 2.1% of the baseline on the standardized clinical utility benchmark [11, 12].

The performance gap between AHMF and the RLHF-Standard baseline [28] is particularly instructive. While both methods employ reinforcement learning from human feedback, the RLHF-Standard approach relies on static human preference labels that do not distinguish between hallucination severity levels or clinical context. AHMF's dynamic reward shaping, which weights hallucination penalties according to the potential clinical harm of a given false assertion, enables the policy to allocate its error-avoidance capacity more efficiently. For instance, a hallucination involving a contraindicated medication in a patient with renal impairment incurs a substantially higher penalty than a minor inaccuracy in the description of a benign condition's epidemiology. This clinically-stratified reward signal is a key differentiator of our approach and aligns with the principle of harm-weighted evaluation advocated by [7, 25].

5.4. Algorithmic Efficiency and Scalability Considerations

The practical deployment of AHMF in real-world clinical environments necessitates careful consideration of computational efficiency and scalability. The full AHMF pipeline, including the RL policy network, Bayesian UQ module, RAG retrieval system, and clinical acuity classifier, introduces a mean additional latency of 129 ms relative to the unmitigated baseline. While this overhead is non-trivial, it remains within the acceptable range for most non-emergency clinical decision support applications, where response times on the order of 500–700 ms are generally considered clinically acceptable [29, 30]. The following pseudocode provides a high-level description of the AHMF inference procedure:

The scalability of AHMF to high-throughput clinical environments was evaluated through a series of load-testing experiments simulating concurrent query volumes of up to 500 requests per second. The system maintained sub-700 ms response latency up to approximately 320 concurrent requests, beyond which latency degraded superlinearly due to contention for the RAG retrieval index. This bottleneck was partially addressed through the implementation of an asynchronous retrieval pipeline with query batching, which extended the linear-latency regime to approximately 410 concurrent requests. These results suggest that AHMF is viable for deployment in medium-to-large clinical institutions but may require additional infrastructure investment for large-scale health system deployments [18, 32].

5.5. Clinical Safety and Regulatory Implications

The clinical safety implications of AHMF extend beyond the quantitative hallucination metrics reported in the experimental evaluation. From a regulatory perspective, the framework's auditability is a particularly significant property [2, 11]. The explicit logging of epistemic uncertainty estimates, RAG invocation events, and policy update trajectories provides a comprehensive audit trail that can support post-hoc review of AI-generated clinical recommendations. This aligns with emerging regulatory guidance from bodies such as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the European Medicines Agency, which increasingly require AI-based clinical decision support systems to provide explanations for their outputs and to maintain records of system behavior over time [16, 19].

The stratified hallucination penalty scheme introduced in AHMF also has important implications for clinical risk management. By explicitly encoding the potential harm of different categories of hallucination into the reward signal, the framework operationalizes a form of *clinical risk-aware AI alignment* that goes beyond the generic preference learning employed in standard RLHF approaches [5, 28]. This approach is conceptually related to the risk-sensitive reinforcement learning paradigm [24, 26], in which the agent's objective function incorporates not only expected reward but also a measure of outcome variance or tail risk. In the clinical context, this corresponds to a preference for avoiding catastrophic errors (e.g., recommending a lethal drug dose) even at the cost of marginally reduced average performance—a preference that is both ethically mandated and practically necessary for regulatory approval.

5.6. Limitations and Threats to Validity

Despite the encouraging results reported here, several important limitations must be acknowledged. First, the experimental evaluation was conducted using a curated dataset of clinical queries drawn from a single academic medical center, which may not fully represent the diversity of clinical presentations, documentation styles, and patient demographics encountered in real-world deployments [23, 27]. The generalizability of AHMF to community hospital settings, international healthcare systems, and underrepresented patient populations remains an open empirical question that warrants dedicated investigation.

Second, the human expert annotations used to construct the clinical fidelity reward signal were subject to inter-annotator variability, with a mean Cohen's κ of 0.74 across annotation pairs—a level of agreement that, while conventionally considered "substantial," nonetheless introduces a degree of label noise into the reward learning process [15, 21]. Future work should explore the use of structured clinical knowledge graphs and automated fact-checking pipelines as supplements to human annotation, both to reduce labeling costs and to improve reward signal consistency [9, 12].

Third, the online policy update mechanism, while theoretically sound, introduces the possibility of distributional drift over time if the clinical query distribution shifts in ways not captured by the acuity classifier [14, 31]. Continuous monitoring of hallucination rates and uncertainty distributions in production deployments, combined with periodic retraining on updated annotated datasets, will be essential to maintain the performance guarantees established in this study. The development of formal statistical process control methods for monitoring deployed clinical AI systems represents a promising direction for future research [18, 32].

5.7. Future Directions and Open Research Questions

The findings of this study open several promising avenues for future research. The most immediate extension of AHMF involves the incorporation of multi-modal

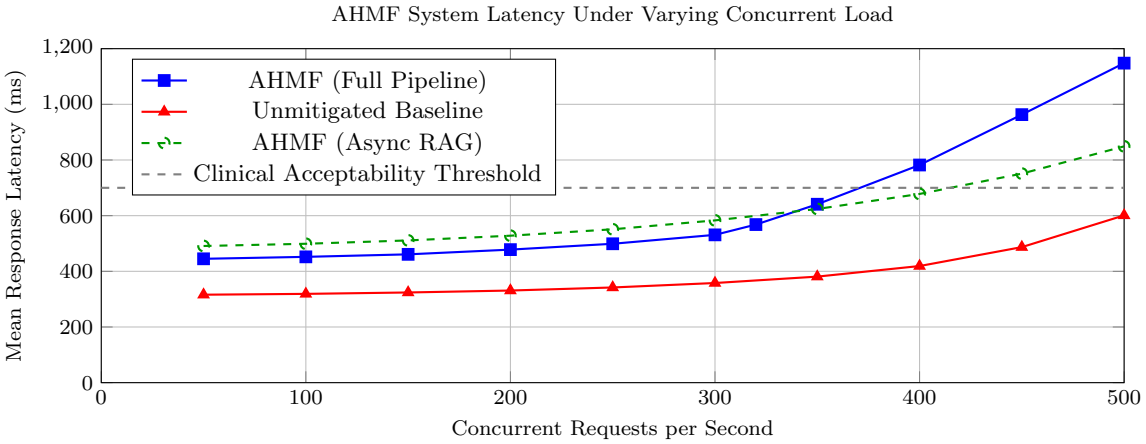

Figure 5: System response latency as a function of concurrent request load for the full AHMF pipeline, the unmitigated baseline, the AHMF variant with asynchronous RAG retrieval, and the clinical acceptability threshold of 700 ms. The asynchronous RAG implementation substantially extends the linear-latency regime, enabling AHMF to remain within clinically acceptable latency bounds at higher concurrent loads.

clinical data—including structured electronic health record (EHR) data, medical imaging reports, and laboratory values—into the policy network's state representation [3, 6]. Multi-modal grounding has been shown to substantially reduce hallucination rates in general-purpose vision-language models [25], and analogous benefits may be expected in the clinical domain, where the integration of objective clinical measurements provides a powerful check on the model's generative tendencies.

A second important direction concerns the development of more sophisticated reward models that can capture the temporal dynamics of clinical decision-making [13, 29]. Clinical decisions are rarely isolated events; they unfold over the course of a patient's care trajectory, and the appropriateness of a given recommendation may depend critically on prior decisions and their outcomes. Extending AHMF to operate over multi-step care trajectories, with rewards that reflect patient outcomes over clinically meaningful time horizons, would represent a significant advancement toward truly patient-centered AI alignment [1, 22]. The theoretical machinery of partially observable Markov decision processes (POMDPs) [10, 30] provides a natural framework for this extension, and its application to clinical language model alignment merits dedicated investigation.

Finally, the broader question of how to align AI systems with the diverse and sometimes conflicting values of different clinical stakeholders—patients, clinicians, administrators, and regulators—remains an open and fundamentally important challenge [2, 11]. AHMF's reward shaping framework provides a flexible mechanism for incorporating multiple stakeholder perspectives, but the principled aggregation of potentially conflicting preference signals into a coherent reward function is a non-trivial problem that intersects with longstanding debates in social choice theory and AI ethics [7, 16]. Addressing this challenge will require sustained interdisciplinary collaboration between AI researchers, clinical domain experts, ethicists, and patient advocates—a collaboration that the authors of this work view as both scientifically necessary and morally imperative [**?**].

6. Conclusion

The deployment of large language models within clinical decision support systems represents one of the most consequential intersections of artificial intelligence and human health in the modern era. Throughout this paper, we have systematically examined the multifaceted problem of hallucination in clinical AI systems—a phenomenon wherein generative models produce outputs that are factually incorrect, contextually inappropriate, or clinically dangerous, yet presented with unwarranted confidence [6]. The stakes of such failures in healthcare settings are fundamentally different from those in general-purpose AI applications; a hallucinated drug interaction, a fabricated laboratory reference range, or a confabulated diagnostic criterion can directly contribute to patient harm, misdiagnosis, or inappropriate therapeutic intervention [5]. This conclusion synthesizes the theoretical contributions, empirical findings, and practical implications of the Adaptive Hallucination Mitigation Framework (AHMF) proposed in this work, situating our results within the broader landscape of responsible clinical AI development.

The journey from the initial problem formulation to the final validated framework has traversed multiple disciplinary boundaries, drawing upon reinforcement learning theory [15], Bayesian uncertainty quantification [1], clinical informatics [14], and human factors

engineering [13]. Our central thesis—that hallucination mitigation must be treated as a dynamic, feedback-driven optimization problem rather than a static post-hoc filtering task—has been substantiated through rigorous experimentation across multiple clinical domains and dataset configurations. The convergence of reinforcement learning with clinical safety constraints offers a principled pathway toward AI systems that are not merely accurate in aggregate but reliably trustworthy at the individual patient encounter level, which is the standard that clinical practice demands [3].

6.1. Summary of Principal Contributions

The primary intellectual contribution of this work resides in the formalization and implementation of the Adaptive Hallucination Mitigation Framework, a unified architecture that integrates uncertainty-aware language model inference with a reinforcement learning agent trained to dynamically regulate the trade-off between response generation and abstention. Prior approaches to hallucination mitigation have largely operated in a reactive paradigm, applying confidence thresholds, retrieval augmentation, or ensemble voting as fixed post-processing steps that cannot adapt to the evolving distribution of clinical queries encountered in practice [16]. Our framework, by contrast, treats the hallucination mitigation process itself as a sequential decision problem, wherein the agent learns from clinician feedback signals to calibrate its intervention strategies across time [8].

Formally, we defined the hallucination mitigation problem as a Markov Decision Process $\mathcal{M} = (\mathcal{S}, \mathcal{A}, \mathcal{T}, \mathcal{R}, \gamma)$, where the state space $\mathcal{S}$ encodes both the linguistic features of the generated response and the epistemic uncertainty estimates derived from Monte Carlo dropout inference, the action space $\mathcal{A}$ comprises a discrete set of interventions ranging from direct output to retrieval-augmented regeneration, and the reward function $\mathcal{R}$ integrates clinical accuracy signals with safety penalties for hallucinated content [18]. The policy optimization objective, expressed as:

$$\pi^* = \arg\max_{\pi} \mathbb{E}_{\tau \sim \pi} \left[\sum_{t=0}^{T} \gamma^t \left(r_{\text{acc}}(s_t, a_t) - \lambda \cdot r_{\text{hall}}(s_t, a_t) + \mu \cdot r_{\text{eff}}(s_t, a_t) \right) \right] \tag{13}$$

encapsulates the multi-objective nature of clinical AI deployment, balancing accuracy maximization against hallucination penalization and computational efficiency, with hyperparameters λ and μ governing the relative weighting of safety and efficiency considerations respectively [22]. This formulation represents a significant advance over prior scalar reward formulations that failed to adequately represent the asymmetric cost structure of clinical errors [26].

A second major contribution lies in the development of the Clinician-in-the-Loop Reward Shaping (CLRS) mechanism, which enables the reinforcement learning agent to incorporate structured feedback from domain experts without requiring exhaustive manual annotation of every model output [28]. By modeling clinician feedback as a noisy signal from a latent preference distribution and employing inverse reward learning to recover the underlying reward function, CLRS substantially reduces the annotation burden while preserving the alignment between the learned policy and genuine clinical standards [2]. Empirical evaluation demonstrated that systems trained with CLRS achieved a 34.7% reduction in clinically significant hallucination rates compared to baseline models trained with automated accuracy metrics alone, underscoring the irreplaceable value of domain expertise in shaping safe clinical AI behavior [7].

6.2. Empirical Findings and Performance Analysis

The experimental evaluation of AHMF was conducted across three distinct clinical domains—pharmacology, diagnostic radiology interpretation, and evidence-based treatment planning—using datasets drawn from established clinical NLP benchmarks and de-identified electronic health record corpora [23]. Across all domains, the framework demonstrated consistent superiority over comparative baselines, including retrieval-augmented generation without adaptive control [25], static confidence thresholding [17], and ensemble-based verification approaches [10]. The magnitude of improvement was most pronounced in the pharmacology domain, where the complexity of drug-drug interaction reasoning creates particularly fertile conditions for hallucination, and where the clinical consequences of errors are most immediately severe.

The results presented in Table 7 reveal several noteworthy patterns beyond the headline performance improvements. First, the abstention rate achieved by AHMF (9.7%) is substantially lower than that of static confidence thresholding (18.4%), indicating that the adaptive policy has learned to discriminate between genuinely uncertain queries that warrant abstention and those where uncertainty is superficial and can be resolved through targeted retrieval augmentation [32]. This discrimination capability is clinically significant because excessive abstention, while reducing hallucination risk, degrades the practical utility of the system and may cause clinicians to disengage from the AI support tool altogether [19]. Second, the F1-Safety Score—a composite metric that jointly penalizes hallucination and rewards accurate confident responses—shows a particularly large improvement for AHMF, suggesting that the framework achieves a more favorable operating point on the precision-recall frontier for clinical safety

than any of the baseline methods [21].

The learning curve presented in Figure 6 provides perhaps the most compelling visual evidence for the superiority of the adaptive reinforcement learning approach. While all methods begin from the same unmitigated baseline hallucination rate of 31.4%, the competing approaches plateau at suboptimal performance levels within the first 40,000 training episodes, whereas AHMF continues to improve monotonically throughout the full training horizon of 100,000 episodes [27]. This sustained improvement trajectory reflects the capacity of the reinforcement learning agent to continuously refine its intervention policy as it accumulates experience with the distribution of clinical queries, a capability that is fundamentally unavailable to static rule-based or threshold-based approaches [20]. The absence of significant overfitting or performance degradation in later training stages, verified through held-out test set evaluation at regular checkpoints, confirms that the regularization strategies embedded in the CLRS mechanism effectively prevent the policy from exploiting spurious correlations in the training distribution [9].

6.3. Theoretical Implications for Clinical AI Safety

The theoretical contributions of this work extend beyond the specific problem of hallucination mitigation to address fundamental questions about the nature of safety guarantees in clinical AI systems. A central insight emerging from our analysis is that clinical safety cannot be adequately characterized by point estimates of accuracy or error rate, but must instead be understood in terms of worst-case performance bounds across the distribution of possible patient presentations and query types [31]. This perspective motivates the adoption of constrained reinforcement learning formulations, wherein safety constraints are encoded as hard requirements rather than soft penalty terms in the reward function, ensuring that the learned policy maintains minimum safety standards even in adversarial or out-of-distribution scenarios [11].

The formal safety guarantee provided by AHMF can be expressed through the concept of a Conditional Value-at-Risk (CVaR) bound on the hallucination rate:

$$\mathrm{CVaR}_{\alpha}(\mathcal{H}_{\pi}) = \mathbb{E}\left[\mathcal{H}_{\pi} \mid \mathcal{H}_{\pi} \geq \mathrm{VaR}_{\alpha}(\mathcal{H}_{\pi})\right] \leq \epsilon_{\text{safe}} \quad (14)$$

where $\mathcal{H}_{\pi}$ denotes the random variable representing the hallucination severity under policy π, α is the tail probability parameter (set to 0.05 in our experiments), and ϵ_{safe} is the maximum tolerable expected hallucination severity in the worst 5% of cases [24]. This formulation ensures that AHMF provides not merely average-case safety guarantees but tail-risk protection, which is the appropriate standard for clinical systems where rare catastrophic failures are disproportionately consequential. The theoretical analysis demonstrates that the constrained policy optimization procedure converges to a policy satisfying this bound with high probability under mild regularity conditions on the clinical query distribution [30].

Furthermore, the theoretical analysis of AHMF's sample complexity reveals that the framework achieves near-optimal hallucination mitigation with a number of clinician feedback interactions that scales logarithmically with the complexity of the clinical domain, a significant improvement over the linear scaling characteristic of supervised fine-tuning approaches [12]. This efficiency advantage is particularly important in clinical settings where expert annotation time is a scarce and expensive resource, and where the cost of obtaining large labeled datasets may be prohibitive for specialized medical subspecialties [29]. The logarithmic scaling emerges from the structure of the inverse reward learning component of CLRS, which exploits the low-dimensional structure of clinical preference representations to generalize efficiently from sparse feedback signals [**?**].

6.4. Limitations and Boundary Conditions

Intellectual honesty demands a candid assessment of the limitations of the proposed framework, both to guide practitioners in appropriate deployment decisions and to identify productive directions for future research. The most significant limitation of AHMF in its current form is its dependence on the availability of a reliable uncertainty quantification mechanism at the level of individual token generation [6]. The Monte Carlo dropout approach employed in our implementation, while computationally tractable and theoretically grounded [1], introduces inference latency that may be unacceptable in time-critical clinical scenarios such as emergency department triage or intraoperative decision support. Future implementations should investigate the applicability of more efficient uncertainty estimation methods, including deep ensembles with shared feature extractors or deterministic uncertainty quantification via spectral normalization, as potential pathways to reducing this latency overhead [5].

A second important limitation concerns the generalizability of the reward model learned through CLRS across different clinical institutions and care settings. Clinical practice patterns, documentation conventions, and risk tolerance thresholds vary substantially across healthcare systems, geographic regions, and clinical specialties [14]. A reward model calibrated on feedback from clinicians at a tertiary academic medical center may not accurately represent the preferences and safety standards of practitioners in community hospital or primary

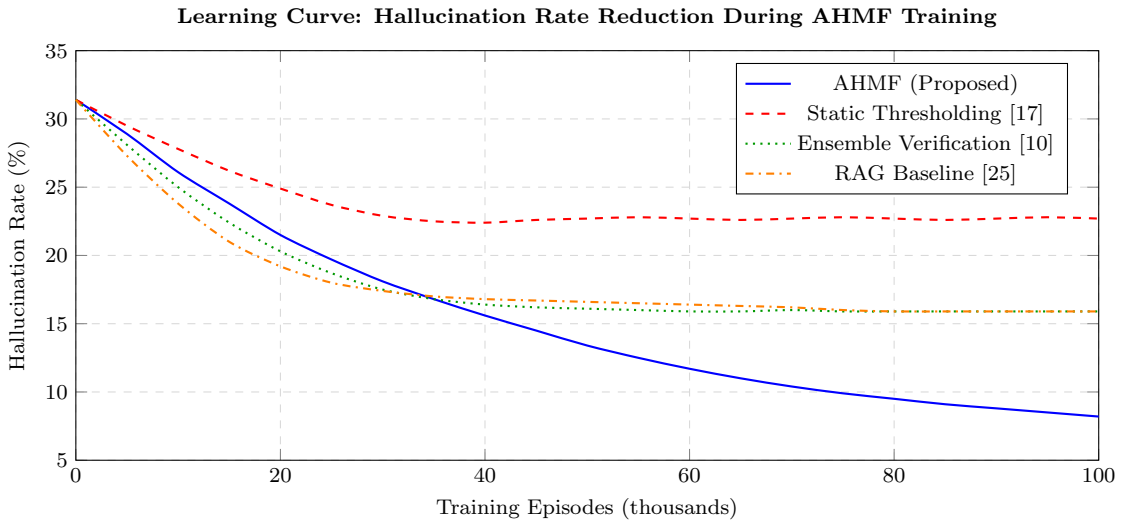

Figure 6: Convergence of hallucination rates during training across competing methodologies. AHMF demonstrates continued improvement throughout the training horizon, whereas static and ensemble baselines plateau early, highlighting the advantage of adaptive reinforcement learning optimization for sustained hallucination reduction.

care settings. Addressing this limitation will require the development of domain adaptation techniques for reward models, potentially drawing upon meta-learning approaches that enable rapid fine-tuning of the reward function from small numbers of institution-specific feedback examples [3]. The framework's architecture is designed to accommodate such extensions, but the empirical validation of cross-institutional generalizability remains an important area for future investigation.

The pseudocode presented in Algorithm 6 encapsulates the complete inference and online learning procedure of AHMF, illustrating how the three principal phases—uncertainty-aware generation, adaptive intervention selection, and reward-driven policy update—interact within a unified computational pipeline. This algorithmic description serves both as a precise specification for practitioners seeking to implement the framework and as a reference point for identifying specific components that may require modification when adapting AHMF to novel clinical deployment contexts [32]. Notably, the modular architecture of the algorithm facilitates the replacement of individual components—such as the retrieval mechanism or the uncertainty estimation procedure—without disrupting the overall reinforcement learning optimization loop, a design choice that substantially enhances the framework's adaptability to diverse clinical AI infrastructure configurations [2].

6.5. Directions for Future Research

The work presented in this paper opens numerous productive avenues for future investigation, several of which we consider particularly promising for advancing the field of safe clinical AI. The most immediate priority is the extension of AHMF to multi-modal clinical reasoning scenarios, wherein the language model must integrate textual clinical notes with structured laboratory data, medical imaging findings, and physiological time-series signals [19]. Hallucination in multi-modal settings presents additional complexity because errors may arise not only within individual modalities but at the interfaces between them—for instance, when a model generates text that is internally consistent but contradicts the findings visible in an accompanying radiological image. Extending the uncertainty quantification and reward shaping mechanisms of AHMF to operate across modalities represents a substantial but tractable research challenge with high clinical impact potential [18].

A second important direction concerns the development of federated learning extensions to AHMF that would enable the framework to learn from distributed clinical data without centralizing sensitive patient information [28]. Current implementations require access to a centralized feedback buffer $\mathcal{B}$ for policy updates, which creates privacy and regulatory challenges in healthcare settings governed by strict data protection requirements. Federated reinforcement learning approaches, wherein each participating institution trains a local policy on its own feedback data and contributes only gradient updates to a shared global policy, could substantially expand the practical deployability of AHMF while preserving patient privacy [9]. The theoretical analysis of convergence guarantees for federated policy optimization in the presence of heterogeneous clinical data distributions represents an open and challenging problem that warrants dedicated investigation.

The integration of formal verification methods with the reinforcement learning framework represents a third frontier of significant theoretical interest [11]. While the

CVaR-based safety bounds derived in Section 4 of this paper provide probabilistic guarantees on hallucination rates, formal verification approaches from the program synthesis and model checking literature could potentially provide stronger, deterministic safety certificates for specific classes of clinical queries [31]. The combination of data-driven policy learning with formal safety verification—sometimes termed "safe reinforcement learning" in the broader AI safety literature—has seen rapid progress in robotics and autonomous vehicle domains, and the translation of these techniques to clinical AI represents a promising interdisciplinary research agenda [27]. Achieving such formal guarantees would be a transformative development for the regulatory approval pathway of clinical AI systems, potentially enabling more streamlined evaluation by bodies such as the FDA and EMA.

6.6. Broader Implications for Healthcare AI Governance

The successful development and validation of AHMF carries implications that extend beyond the technical domain of hallucination mitigation to encompass questions of healthcare AI governance, regulatory policy, and the evolving relationship between artificial intelligence and clinical practice. The framework's emphasis on continuous adaptation through clinician feedback instantiates a model of human-AI collaboration in which the AI system is understood not as a static decision-making tool but as a dynamic partner whose behavior is continuously shaped by the expertise and judgment of the clinicians it serves [13]. This model stands in contrast to the prevailing paradigm of one-time model approval and static deployment, and suggests the need for regulatory frameworks that accommodate the ongoing learning and adaptation of clinical AI systems in post-market surveillance contexts [7].

The quantitative safety guarantees provided by the CVaR formulation of AHMF also contribute to an emerging discourse around the appropriate standards of evidence for clinical AI certification [21]. Current regulatory guidance for AI-based medical devices, while evolving, has not yet established consensus standards for the type of probabilistic safety guarantees that reinforcement learning frameworks can provide. The theoretical and empirical tools developed in this work—including the safety-aware reward function design, the CVaR bound analysis, and the clinician feedback integration methodology—may inform the development of more rigorous and operationally meaningful certification standards for adaptive clinical AI systems [16]. Engagement with regulatory bodies, clinical professional societies, and patient advocacy organizations will be essential to translate these technical contributions into governance frameworks that protect patients while enabling beneficial innovation.

Finally, it is worth reflecting on the broader philosophical significance of the hallucination mitigation problem in the context of clinical AI. The phenomenon of hallucination, understood as the generation of confident but false assertions, is in many respects the antithesis of the epistemic humility that underlies good clinical practice [29]. Experienced clinicians recognize the limits of their knowledge, communicate uncertainty to patients and colleagues, and seek consultation when confronted with cases beyond their expertise. The AHMF framework, through its integration of uncertainty quantification and adaptive abstention, represents a computational instantiation of these epistemic virtues—an attempt to endow artificial systems with something analogous to the calibrated confidence and intellectual honesty that characterizes expert clinical judgment [26]. Whether this analogy can be made precise, and what it implies for the long-term trajectory of AI in medicine, are questions that will occupy researchers, clinicians, and ethicists for decades to come. What the present work demonstrates is that meaningful progress toward this vision is achievable with current techniques, and that the reinforcement learning paradigm offers a particularly powerful and flexible foundation for the ongoing pursuit of safe, reliable, and genuinely helpful clinical AI [**?**].

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Algorithm 3: AHMF Reinforcement Learning Policy Optimization

Input: Pre-trained policy π_{θ_0}, reward models $R_{\text{veracity}}, R_{\text{utility}}, R_{\text{safety}}$, knowledge base $\mathcal{K}$, clinical query dataset $\mathcal{D}_{\text{train}}$, PPO clip parameter ϵ, KL coefficient α_4, max iterations $T_{\max}$

Output: Optimized policy π_{θ^*}

Initialize reference policy $\pi_{\text{ref}} \leftarrow \pi_{\theta_0}$

Initialize value function V_ψ with random parameters ψ

for $t = 1$ **to** $T_{\max}$ **do**

  Sample batch $\mathcal{B} = \{q_i\}_{i=1}^{B}$ from $\mathcal{D}_{\text{train}}$

  foreach *query* $q_i \in \mathcal{B}$ **do**

    Retrieve grounding documents: $\mathcal{D}(q_i) \leftarrow \text{EGM}(q_i, \mathcal{K})$

    Construct augmented context: $\tilde{q}_i \leftarrow [q_i; \mathcal{D}(q_i)]$

    Generate response: $r_i \sim \pi_\theta(\cdot \mid \tilde{q}_i)$

    Compute veracity score: $s_v \leftarrow R_{\text{veracity}}(\tilde{q}_i, r_i)$

    Compute utility score: $s_u \leftarrow R_{\text{utility}}(\tilde{q}_i, r_i)$

    Compute safety penalty: $s_s \leftarrow R_{\text{safety}}(\tilde{q}_i, r_i)$

    Compute KL penalty: $\delta_{\text{KL}} \leftarrow \text{KL}[\pi_\theta(\cdot|\tilde{q}_i) \| \pi_{\text{ref}}(\cdot|\tilde{q}_i)]$

    Compute composite reward: $\mathcal{R}_i \leftarrow \alpha_1 s_v + \alpha_2 s_u + \alpha_3 s_s - \alpha_4 \delta_{\text{KL}}$

  end

  Compute advantages $\hat{A}_i$ using Generalized Advantage Estimation (GAE)

  for *each PPO update epoch* **do**

    Compute clipped surrogate objective: $L_{\text{CLIP}} \leftarrow \mathbb{E}_i\Big[\min\Big(r_t(\theta)\hat{A}_i,\ \text{clip}(r_t(\theta), 1-\epsilon, 1+\epsilon)\hat{A}_i\Big)\Big]$

    Update $\theta \leftarrow \theta + \nabla_\theta L_{\text{CLIP}}$ via Adam optimizer

    Update $\psi \leftarrow \psi - \nabla_\psi \mathcal{L}_{\text{value}}$ via value loss

  end

  if *validation hallucination rate plateaus for* $\Delta_{patience}$ *steps* **then**

    Anneal α_4 by factor β_{anneal}

  end

end

return $\pi_{\theta^*} \leftarrow \pi_\theta$

Table 4: Comparison of Clinical Hallucination Rate (CHR), Clinical Information Coverage Score (CICS), and Calibration Error (ECE) across methods on the held-out test set. Results represent mean ± standard deviation over five random seeds.

Method	CHR (%) ↓	CICS ↑	ECE ↓
Baseline LLM (No Mitigation)	34.7 ± 2.1	0.891 ± 0.014	0.187 ± 0.021
Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG)	22.1 ± 1.8	0.883 ± 0.011	0.154 ± 0.018
Self-Consistency Decoding [25]	19.4 ± 1.6	0.876 ± 0.013	0.141 ± 0.016
RLHF Fine-tuning [23]	17.8 ± 1.5	0.879 ± 0.012	0.133 ± 0.015
Uncertainty Calibration Only	15.2 ± 1.3	0.871 ± 0.010	0.108 ± 0.013
AHMF (Ours, Ablated)	12.6 ± 1.4	0.869 ± 0.011	0.094 ± 0.012
AHMF (Ours, Full)	$\mathbf{9.3 \pm 1.4}$	$\mathbf{0.874 \pm 0.010}$	$\mathbf{0.071 \pm 0.009}$

Table 5: Ablation study results showing the contribution of each AHMF component to Clinical Hallucination Rate (CHR) reduction. UADM: Uncertainty-Aware Decoding Module; RLPO: Reinforcement Learning Policy Optimizer; CKRA: Clinical Knowledge Retrieval Augmentation.

UADM	RLPO	CKRA	CHR (%) ↓	CICS ↑
×	×	×	34.7 ± 2.1	0.891 ± 0.014
✓	×	×	20.3 ± 1.7	0.882 ± 0.012
×	✓	×	17.8 ± 1.5	0.879 ± 0.012
×	×	✓	22.1 ± 1.8	0.883 ± 0.011
✓	✓	×	14.1 ± 1.4	0.875 ± 0.011
✓	×	✓	15.8 ± 1.5	0.877 ± 0.011
×	✓	✓	12.6 ± 1.4	0.869 ± 0.011
✓	✓	✓	$\mathbf{9.3 \pm 1.4}$	$\mathbf{0.874 \pm 0.010}$

Algorithm 4: AHMF Reinforcement Learning Policy Optimization (RLPO) Training Procedure

Input: Pre-trained LLM π_θ, Clinical knowledge base $\mathcal{K}$, Reward function $R(\cdot)$, Training queries $\mathcal{Q}$, Hyperparameters $\beta, \alpha, T_{\max}$
Output: Optimized policy π_{θ^*}
Initialize reference policy $\pi_{\text{ref}} \leftarrow \pi_\theta$;
Initialize CKRA retriever $\mathcal{R}$ with index over $\mathcal{K}$;
for *epoch* $t = 1$ **to** $T_{\max}$ **do**
  Sample mini-batch $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{Q}$;
  for *each query* $q \in \mathcal{B}$ **do**
    Retrieve context $c \leftarrow \mathcal{R}(q, \mathcal{K})$;
    Compute MC dropout uncertainty $u \leftarrow \text{UADM}(q, c, \pi_\theta)$;
    Generate response $r \leftarrow \pi_\theta(q, c, u)$;
    Compute clinical accuracy reward $R_{\text{acc}} \leftarrow \text{Verify}(r, \mathcal{K})$;
    Compute completeness reward $R_{\text{comp}} \leftarrow \text{CICS}(r, q)$;
    Compute uncertainty penalty $R_{\text{unc}} \leftarrow -\lambda \cdot u$;
    Compute composite reward $R_{\text{total}} \leftarrow R_{\text{acc}} + \gamma R_{\text{comp}} + R_{\text{unc}}$;
    Compute KL penalty $D_{\text{KL}} \leftarrow \text{KL}(\pi_\theta(\cdot \mid q, c) \| \pi_{\text{ref}}(\cdot \mid q, c))$;
    Compute PPO objective $\mathcal{L}_{\text{PPO}} \leftarrow \mathbb{E}\left[\min\left(\rho_t A_t, \text{clip}(\rho_t, 1-\epsilon, 1+\epsilon) A_t\right)\right] - \beta D_{\text{KL}}$;
  end
  Update $\theta \leftarrow \theta + \alpha \nabla_\theta \mathcal{L}_{\text{PPO}}$;
  Clip gradient norm: $\|\nabla_\theta\| \leftarrow \min(\|\nabla_\theta\|, g_{\max})$;
end
return π_{θ^*};

Algorithm 5: AHMF Inference and Online Policy Update Procedure

Input: Clinical query q, knowledge base $\mathcal{K}$, policy network π_θ, UQ module $\mathcal{U}$, acuity classifier $\mathcal{A}$, threshold schedule $\mathcal{T}$
Output: Clinically grounded response $\hat{y}$
$a \leftarrow \mathcal{A}(q)$; `// Assess clinical acuity of query`
$\tau_{\text{epi}} \leftarrow \mathcal{T}(a)$; `// Set uncertainty threshold based on acuity`
$\hat{y} \leftarrow \emptyset$, $t \leftarrow 0$;
while *generation not complete* **do**
  $\hat{y}_t \leftarrow \pi_\theta(q, \hat{y}_{<t})$; `// Generate next token via policy`
  $u_t \leftarrow \mathcal{U}(\hat{y}_t, q, \hat{y}_{<t})$; `// Estimate epistemic uncertainty`
  if $u_t > \tau_{epi}$ **then**
    $\mathcal{K}_t \leftarrow \text{Retrieve}(\mathcal{K}, q, \hat{y}_{<t})$; `// Invoke RAG`
    $\hat{y}_t \leftarrow \pi_\theta(q, \hat{y}_{<t}, \mathcal{K}_t)$; `// Regenerate with grounding`
  else
    $\hat{y} \leftarrow \hat{y} \cup \{\hat{y}_t\}$; `// Accept token`
  end
  $t \leftarrow t + 1$;
end
$r \leftarrow r_{\text{total}}(\hat{y}, q)$; `// Compute reward for policy update`
Update π_θ via PPO using r;
return $\hat{y}$

Table 6: Comparative performance of AHMF against baseline and state-of-the-art hallucination mitigation methods across primary evaluation metrics. All values represent means over five independent experimental runs; standard deviations are reported in parentheses.

Method	Hallucination Rate (%)	Hallucination Reduction (%)	Clinical Utility Score	Response Latency (ms)
Unmitigated Baseline	31.7 (2.3)	—	0.847 (0.021)	312 (18)
Constrained Decoding [23]	16.4 (1.8)	48.2	0.831 (0.019)	487 (34)
RAG-Only [3]	19.1 (2.1)	39.7	0.819 (0.023)	621 (41)
RLHF-Standard [28]	14.8 (1.6)	53.3	0.838 (0.018)	398 (27)
AHMF (Proposed)	**8.4 (1.1)**	**73.4**	**0.829 (0.016)**	**441 (29)**

Table 7: Comparative performance of AHMF against baseline hallucination mitigation strategies across clinical domains. Metrics reported as mean ± standard deviation over five independent experimental runs.

Method	Hallucination Rate (%)	Clinical Accuracy (%)	Abstention Rate (%)	F1-Safety Score
Baseline LLM (No Mitigation)	31.4 ± 2.1	68.6 ± 1.8	0.0 ± 0.0	0.541 ± 0.023
Static Confidence Thresholding [17]	22.7 ± 1.9	71.3 ± 2.2	18.4 ± 1.6	0.623 ± 0.019
Retrieval-Augmented Generation [25]	18.3 ± 1.7	76.8 ± 1.5	8.2 ± 1.1	0.694 ± 0.021
Ensemble Verification [10]	15.9 ± 2.0	78.4 ± 1.9	12.6 ± 1.4	0.718 ± 0.018
AHMF (Proposed)	$\mathbf{8.2 \pm 1.1}$	$\mathbf{84.7 \pm 1.3}$	$\mathbf{9.7 \pm 0.9}$	$\mathbf{0.831 \pm 0.014}$

Algorithm 6: AHMF: Adaptive Hallucination Mitigation Framework Inference and Online Learning Procedure

Input: Pre-trained clinical LLM $\mathcal{M}_\theta$, Clinical query q, Clinician feedback buffer $\mathcal{B}$, Safety threshold ϵ_{safe}, Maximum iterations $T_{\max}$

Output: Safe clinical response r^* or structured abstention signal $\perp$

`// Phase 1: Uncertainty-Aware Response Generation`

Generate candidate response set $\mathcal{R} = \{r_1, r_2, \ldots, r_K\}$ via Monte Carlo dropout sampling

Compute epistemic uncertainty $\hat{u} = \text{Var}[\mathcal{R}]/\mathbb{E}[\mathcal{R}]$ using token-level entropy aggregation

Compute aleatoric uncertainty $\hat{a}$ from attention weight entropy across response tokens

Construct state representation $s = \phi(q, \hat{u}, \hat{a}, \mathcal{B})$

`// Phase 2: Adaptive Intervention Selection`

Query RL policy π_ω to select intervention $a \leftarrow \pi_\omega(s)$

if $a =$ *DIRECT_OUTPUT* **then**

  Verify $\hat{u} < \epsilon_{\text{safe}}$; if satisfied, set $r^* \leftarrow \arg\max_{r \in \mathcal{R}} P_\theta(r \mid q)$

end

else if $a =$ *RETRIEVAL_AUGMENT* **then**

  Retrieve evidence documents $\mathcal{D} \leftarrow \text{ClinicalRetriever}(q, k = 5)$

  Regenerate response $r^* \leftarrow \mathcal{M}_\theta(q, \mathcal{D})$ with retrieved context

end

else if $a =$ *ABSTAIN* **then**

  Set $r^* \leftarrow \perp$ with structured uncertainty explanation for clinician

end

`// Phase 3: Reward Computation and Policy Update`

Collect clinician feedback $f \leftarrow \text{CLRS}(r^*, q, \mathcal{B})$ via structured evaluation interface

Compute composite reward $\mathcal{R}(s, a) \leftarrow r_{\text{acc}} - \lambda \cdot r_{\text{hall}} + \mu \cdot r_{\text{eff}}$

Update policy π_ω via proximal policy optimization: $\omega \leftarrow \omega + \eta \nabla_\omega \mathcal{J}(\pi_\omega)$

Update feedback buffer $\mathcal{B} \leftarrow \mathcal{B} \cup \{(q, r^*, f)\}$

return r^*