# This Healthcare Technology is Off the Blockchain

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Predicting the future—particularly when it comes to technology—can be a fool's errand. But it's a pretty safe bet that one innovation those in the health IT world can expect to hear more about is "blockchain."

If you've heard of blockchain before it's likely because it most frequently is associated with Bitcoin, a form of currency used on the Internet—and a method of payment favored by ransomware developers. Last summer, the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT (ONC) announced its Blockchain Challenge, which encouraged competitors to submit white papers detailing the best ways to use blockchain in healthcare—for the good of the industry.

As ONC defines it, blockchain is "a data structure that can be time-stamped and signed using a private key to prevent tampering." Or, as a report from Deloitte puts it, blockchain "allows for the secure management of a shared ledger, where transactions are verified and stored on a network without a governing central authority. Blockchains can come in different configurations, ranging from public, open-source networks to private blockchains that require explicit permission to read or write."[1]

Health IT stakeholders say that facets of this technology could help enable longitudinal health records, reduce mistakes in a health record, secure patient-to-physician communications, and improve interoperability. Indeed, winners of ONC's challenge proposed use cases using blockchain to secure storage of patient data, improve insurance preauthorization processes, improve the privacy of clinical trial data, and many more.[2]

ONC received 70 white papers as part of the challenge and awarded grants to 15 participants. For more details on the winning papers, visit www.healthit.gov.

## Notes

1. Deloitte Consulting. "Tech Trends 2016: Innovating in the digital era."
2. Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT. "ONC announces Blockchain challenge winners." Press release. September 1, 2016.

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