

# Watson vs. Big Data

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It is the matchup of the century—the towering hulk of healthcare’s Big Data versus the super computer known as Watson. Will Watson be able to take on this lumbering, untamed mass of information and whip it into submission?

One year ago, the *Journal of AHIMA* reported on the IBM super computer Watson’s use by healthcare providers like Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center and medical product supply chain vendors. Since then, Watson has seen its interaction with the health IT realm balloon, and has now set its sights on helping healthcare providers and researchers analyze crucial clues from the health data of millions of Americans.

In April, IBM announced that its Watson Health data analytics division is partnering with Apple (including Apple HealthKit and ResearchKit on the Apple Watch), Johnson & Johnson, and Medtronic to collect data, conduct analysis, and give feedback on consumer and medical device applications. IBM also announced it was buying the healthcare startups Explorys and Phytel, both of which offer cloud computing and storage services. A month later Watson Health entered into a partnership with the electronic health record (EHR) vendor Epic, and the Mayo Clinic, *Healthcare IT News* reported.

The latest pairing offers the potential to expand EHR interoperability and enable patient data sharing. Ideally, Watson will be able to aggregate information from a patient’s EHR, wearable fitness devices, insulin pumps, smartphone fitness trackers, and other inputs to personalize their treatment.

A *New York Times* report on Watson Health’s recent activities questions how well developers and providers will do with maintaining privacy and confidentiality in Watson’s sea of data. But some are looking at the bright side.

“If that future when all this stuff works is going to become real, then having some of the key players come together is the only way it’s going to happen. This could be a pretty important step along the way,” said Dr. Robert M. Wachter, a professor at the University of California, San Francisco medical school, in an interview with the *New York Times*.

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**Article citation:**

AHIMA Staff. "Watson vs. Big Data" *Journal of AHIMA* 86, no.7 (July 2015): 68.

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