

Google's diabetes partnerships could be just the start



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Google's latest venture – the diabetes collaboration with Sanofi now known as Onduo – is another example of tech companies getting involved in the healthcare world. Google has been particularly active, with six pharma and medtech deals since 2014, but other players like IBM and Qualcomm have also been busy (see tables below).

Diabetes is particularly ripe for disruption, as tech companies can exploit existing data from blood glucose monitoring to evaluate various interventions. Then there are the currently disparate components of therapy that could be brought together to improve care and cut costs. It is not beyond the realms of possibility that the likes of Google might eventually acquire a diabetes drug developer to combine glucose monitoring, analytics and therapy.

The cost argument is strong for this kind of approach. Drug prices are being squeezed by payers as governments face a surge in diabetes cases with ageing and increasingly overweight populations, so anything that can make care more efficient is likely to have an edge.

If integrated strategies are also shown to reduce downstream costs from hospitalisations or disability due to diabetes-related complications, then so much the better. And the data processing power that technology groups bring could help to prove such a benefit. Meanwhile, the tech companies benefit from the regulatory expertise of the pharma groups.

It is therefore no surprise that five of the 16 technology crossover deals tracked by *EP Vantage* are in diabetes. Google, through its life sciences arm Verily, has a second collaboration in the space with Novartis's Alcon division, which focuses on the other end of the care continuum, glucose monitoring using a novel device, a so-called smart contact lens. That deal also covers a smart lens to correct presbyopia, or age-related farsightedness.

Google's ventures in pharma & medtech		
Partner	Project	Date
Sanofi	Onduo: diabetes management	Aug 2016
GlaxoSmithKline	Galvani: bioelectronic medicines	Aug 2016
Johnson & Johnson	Verb: robotic surgery	Mar 2015
Biogen	Multiple sclerosis	Jan 2015
Abbvie	Calico: age-related diseases	Sep 2014
Novartis/Alcon	Smart lens technology	Jul 2014

Meanwhile, IBM and Qualcomm seem keen not to be left behind, with agreements with the likes of Medtronic and Novo Nordisk in diabetes.

The other sectors for collaborations are varied, but many are in other chronic disorders, as might be expected. Novartis, the most active pharma partner, also has several deals with Qualcomm, the most recent of which involves a smart inhaler for COPD.

As well as pharma groups, IBM has teamed up with the health insurer Anthem and medical centres including the Mayo Clinic, [among others](#).

IBM and Qualcomm's deals with pharma & medtech

Company	Partner	Project	Date
Qualcomm	Philips	"Connected health"	Aug 2016
Qualcomm	Medtronic	Continuous glucose monitoring for diabetes	May 2016
Qualcomm	Novartis	Smart inhalers for COPD	Jan 2016
IBM Watson Health	Novo Nordisk	Diabetes management	Dec 2015
IBM Watson Health	Teva	Chronic conditions including asthma, pain, migraine and neurodegenerative diseases	Sep 2015
IBM Watson Health	Johnson & Johnson	Rehabilitation after surgery	Apr 2015
IBM Watson Health	Medtronic	Diabetes management	Apr 2015
IBM Watson Health	Apple	Collection of personal health data	Apr 2015
Qualcomm	Novartis	"Trials of the future"/"Beyond the pill"	Jan 2015
Qualcomm	Roche	Chronic disease management	Jan 2015

One technology giant that has so far steered clear of big pharma deals is Apple. However, Apple is still making moves in healthcare with its ResearchKit app, which is designed to gather data for use in medical research, and has signed up various academic institutions.

Interestingly, Apple and IBM have their own partnership, which combines Apple Watch sensors and the ResearchKit with IBM's Watson Health Cloud - the first project for the two companies was a sleep health app.

A few years ago, eyebrows were raised when companies like Google made efforts to expand into healthcare, but now these kinds of deals are much more common. Similarly, an acquisition no longer seems so far-fetched.

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