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Project Nightingale: The Google-Ascension partnership

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On November 11, the *Wall Street Journal* reported (https://on.wsj.com/2CELyar)[1] that Alphabet Inc's Google had formed a partnership with Ascension, a Catholic chain of 2,600 hospitals, doctors' offices, and other facilities, code named Project Nightingale. The project involves Google setting up a cloud-based database for Ascension that collects, organizes, and displays patient data in order to streamline medical services and help Ascension gain a quick overview of a particular patient's needs.

The *WSJ* story caused an immediate backlash, with media outlets questioning how Google could gain access to so much private medical data, and ethics and privacy professionals wonder if the partnership could be a violation of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) (http://bit.ly/33Krsax).[2] Patients were not informed of the partnership, and the *WSJ* article claims that doctors were also not notified.

"My experience with these data mongers is that they only see the beauty of the technical aspects: gathering, analyzing and then dreaming up revenues from the use of the data," said Marianne Jennings, Professor Emeritus at the W.P. Carey School of Business. "They are amoral technicians who see data as data, not the personal information of an individual."[3]

"The names and dates of birth in their gathering *really* are troublesome," she added. "You do not need that information for figuring out treatments."

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