Anthem to Provide Blockchain Medical Data to 40 Million Members

U.S. health insurer Anthem, with around 40 million members, is increasingly relying on blockchain technology for more secure and efficient management of health data. Hyperledger Fabric, Indy and Burrow are among the blockchains the company is using.

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Blockchain, also called digital ledger, has made it easier for Anthem to process huge transaction volumes, currently averaging about 300,000 a week for patient health data.

Just recently, the company launched a pilot programme to enable groups of members to securely access and share their medical data. These "select" members can use an app on their phones, scan a QR code, and instantly grant different healthcare providers access to their health records. It must be noted that such access is valid only during the period of consultation with the doctor, and can be revoked once the appointment is over – meaning the member's medical records are private again.

The new system is being used by a pilot test group composed of about 200 company employees. Anthem says all its 40 million members will have access to the system in the next two to three years.

“What blockchain potentially gives us the opportunity to do is not worry about those trust issues,” according to Anthem CEO Gail Boudreaux. “We have an opportunity now to share data that people can make their own decisions on.”

At the start of 2019, Anthem revealed its ongoing blockchain-focused collaboration with several partners including IBM, Aetna, Health Care Service Corporation and PNC Bank. The goal is to help keep patient data private while increasing interoperability (the ability of different digital health systems to exchange information) and trust between partners, according to Anthem's chief digital officer Rajeev Ronanki.

Health insurance companies gather and keep patient medical data based on insurance claims. For Anthem, using blockchain is necessary to give patients more immediate access to their records while allowing them to control who views their health data.

“We're essentially creating a permission-based system that would allow consumers to own their healthcare data, and then make it available to providers as appropriate," Ronanki explains.

Anthem also plans to use blockchain technology for processing insurance claims and coordinating benefits faster. When a patient is covered by more than one provider, Ronanki notes, it can take a lot of time to chase down information. As a result, members suffer when processing of claims gets delayed.

Using blockchain will enable Anthem to quickly access the most up-to-date data about which person or treatments are covered by which company. “We can create trusted partnerships, without having to share the underlying data," Ronanki points out.

Lucie Robson

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