

Arthritis Research UK Introduces IBM Watson-Powered 'Virtual Assistant' to Provide Information and Advice to People with Arthritis

LONDON, March 13, 2017 /PRNewswire/ -- Arthritis Research UK and IBM (NYSE:[IBM](#)) today announced the development of a Watson-powered 'virtual personal assistant' to provide information and advice to people living with arthritis. The charity has teamed up with IBM to ensure people seeking help will have access to personalised information from the Arthritis Research UK website, delivered in a form that feels like a natural conversation. The service will be accessible on mobile phones and computers, without the need to download an app. There are currently 300 people with arthritis helping Arthritis Research UK to test and feedback before it is launched publicly on the charity's website later this year.

For the millions of people living with the lifelong impact of all kinds of arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions, finding an answer to questions about their condition can be a challenge. Arthritis affects people in different ways, so for some turning to the internet and sorting through pages of conflicting advice can be daunting and confusing. Every year, Arthritis Research UK's website receives thousands of personal questions about the impact arthritis has on day to day life, symptoms and treatment options.

By tapping into IBM's Watson Conversation API, the charity has found an innovative way for people with arthritis to quickly and easily get answers to questions as soon as it pops into their head – no matter where they are or the time of day. This new service will mean that for the first time Arthritis Research UK will be able to provide every person in the UK seeking information about arthritis, immediate access to the best and most accurate information tailored to them. It will be supported by the charity's information and enquiries line, where a team will be on hand to help answer detailed or complex questions.

Liam O'Toole, Chief Executive Officer at Arthritis Research UK, said: "We know that there are millions of people in the UK living with arthritis whose lives are severely limited as they struggle with unanswered questions. We want to ensure that everyone has access to information and support, whenever and wherever they need it.

"We're really excited to be working with IBM Watson on this innovative new service that will enable us to have conversations with anyone seeking help, that we simply wouldn't be able to answer so quickly otherwise. We're confident that this new virtual assistant will help more people push back the ways arthritis limits their lives."

The digital personal assistant was developed over five months using the charity's 80 years of research based knowledge and expertise as well as advice from health care professionals, people with arthritis and IBM Watson cognitive computing experts. Over 350 people with arthritis have been involved during this time, to help develop, test and improve the tool. Initially, the service will be able to provide general information about arthritis and exercise that people can print out or save online.

In time, this knowledge base will grow to enable Arthritis Research UK to answer more questions – including those around diet and treatment options. As IBM Watson learns from each interaction, it will refine the information that is surfaced. Following this, Arthritis Research UK plans to leverage Watson cognitive voice input/output and location services to extend its capabilities, for example to understand questions delivered via speech (versus typed via a keyboard).

"Arthritis Research UK developed the Watson-powered digital personal assistant themselves, providing a terrific example of how IBM's open, cloud-based Watson development platform is making cognitive computing broadly accessible to organizations and individuals worldwide," said Cameron Brooks, IBM European Director for Watson in the Public Sector. "Further, Arthritis Research UK's use of Watson APIs is a model for organizations thinking about how they might integrate cognitive computing into their services in order to positively impact the lives of people living with a serious health condition."

About Arthritis Research UK

Arthritis Research UK is the charity committed to ensuring people with arthritis are in control of their condition. We invest in breakthrough treatments, the best information and vital support for everyone affected by arthritis. We believe that by harnessing the power of exceptional science we can overcome the pain, isolation and fatigue arthritis causes, making everyday life better for all people with arthritis in the UK.

For further information visit: <http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org/>

About IBM Watson Health

Watson is the first commercially available cognitive computing capability representing a new era in computing. The system, delivered through the cloud, analyzes high volumes of data, understands complex questions posed in natural language, and proposes evidence-based answers. Watson continuously learns, gaining in value and knowledge over time, from previous interactions. In April 2015, the company launched IBM Watson Health and the Watson Health Cloud platform. The new unit helps improve the ability of doctors, researchers and insurers to innovate by surfacing insights from the massive amount of personal health data being created and shared daily. The Watson Health Cloud can mask patient identities and allow for information to be shared and combined with a dynamic and constantly growing aggregated view of clinical, research and social health data.

For more information on IBM Watson, visit: ibm.com/watson. For more information on IBM Watson Health, visit: ibm.com/watsonhealth.

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