

# Determining the Longitude of Data

What do you think of when you hear the word longitude? Your 4th grade history class? The term opposite of latitude? We can't blame you. It's important geography vocabulary, after all. But, we'd be remiss if we didn't introduce you to its health IT-related cousin: longitudinal data.

Last week, we [tweeted](#) a link to [an article](#) on longitudinal data, but upon further thought we decided it was worth a deeper explanation. Something tells us that it's going to be an important buzzword very soon.

Simply put, longitudinal data is data gathered during a longitudinal survey- a type of observational study. The data itself is a collection of information about a patient, recorded over the course of many years to [track the patient's health](#). Too often, doctors rely on incomplete data sets or inaccurate patient memories when creating a course of treatment. Take for example, there is always the possibility that a patient has forgotten key symptoms after a procedure years ago. The collection of data consistently, over a long period of time, increases the chances of doctors making [better informed decisions](#) for their patients.

That's the most basic principal of longitudinal data, but there are so many more possibilities. Consider a longitudinal data set that not only contains your complete medical history, but also your demographic data. It can then be compared to other patients in similar circumstances with similar medical histories to offer doctors a wealth of information from which to make a recommendation.

Much like a sextant is needed to measure longitude and latitude, interoperability is needed for this time of data

configuration. So, you can add the benefits of longitudinal data among the many reasons to have secure, integrated data sharing across healthcare systems.