

5.18.11 | Arundhati Parmar

## Medtronic, Ford developing in-car diabetes management system



Prototype of the display in a car

Imagine if your in-car *infotainment* system could also alert you when your blood glucose levels were low.

Ford and [Medtronic \(NYSE:MDT\)](#) have launched such a project. The automaker has teamed with the developer of new innovative medical devices on a research project to deliver health information as people drive.

Services and apps will target people suffering from chronic illnesses or medical disorders such as diabetes, asthma or allergies. Ford is planning to add these capabilities to its [Sync technology](#), which allows people to make hands free calls, listen to music by connecting to an mp3 player and generate vehicle health reports, among other things.

Aside from Medtronic, Ford is also working with [WellDoc](#) and [SDI Health](#), which developed the informational allergy website [pollen.com](#), as part of Ford's initial foray into providing health and wellness connectivity solutions.

Through its collaboration with Medtronic, Ford wants the Sync technology to connect to a bluetooth compatible continuous glucose monitoring device and share glucose levels and trends through audio and in-car displays that can also provide secondary alerts if levels are too low.

A senior Medtronic executive explained that prototype devices will contain sensors that will be able to communicate to systems that can inform drivers of their blood glucose level trends.

"If that trend is in the wrong way, then it alerts you of that," said James Dallas, a Medtronic senior vice president. "As a result we prevent a situation from becoming an acute one."

Medtronic approached Ford as early as 2005.

"Medtronic was the one that first approached us via their involvement in a research project that connected them with a senior Ford executive," said Venkatesh Prasad, senior technical leader for Infotronics, Ford Research and Innovation in an e-mail. "From there, our research labs kicked off the project together."

The project began in 2006 and the first prototype began to run in 2008.

Medtronic's Dallas said that the company has already embedded Bluetooth capability in some diabetes management devices but they are not yet commercially available.

A Ford spokesman said that these tools are part of a research project and will be sold in the market only if Ford determines that there is consumer demand for it. But the language of the Ford press release hints that the argument for commercial viability has already been made. A portion of the release reads this way:

*According to a recent survey conducted by CTIA-The Wireless Association and Harris Interactive, for example, some 78 percent of U.S. consumers expressed interest in mobile health solutions. A recent study by digital messaging powerhouse MobileStorm further confirmed this phenomenon, indicating that medical and healthcare apps was the third fastest-growing category of smartphone applications in early 2010.*

Medtronic's Dallas also seemed convinced that convergence between consumer electronics and device manufacturers is the wave of the future because advances in consumer electronics is now facilitating health care companies to extend their reach and could help to improve outcomes and lower healthcare costs. He said it fits well with Medtronic's overarching mission of alleviating pain, restoring health and extending life.

"The reason we are having this strategic relationship is to be able to take the data that's related to a chronic disease and then turn that into insight where a person can turn that insight into action," Dallas stressed.

And Medtronic's foray into consumer electronics is not limited to its partnership with Ford. The company is also working with a number of other companies, including IBM, Cisco, and Qualcomm. Those projects that are in progress span security, data management and data aggregation as well as presenting the data in a user-friendly manner, Dallas said.