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Wheels



The Nuts and Bolts of Whatever Moves You

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Diabetic? Ford May Have an App for That

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Sam VarnHagen/Ford Motor Company

An app under development by Ford relays potentially important health information like U.V. index, pollen counts and, for diabetics, glucose levels.

While driving recently along the Ventura Freeway in Los Angeles, I watched a driver drift across traffic and settle at the shoulder of the road. Other drivers pulled over, exited their vehicles and began slapping the car's windows in an effort to arouse the motorist, who was slumped over the wheel. I do not know the driver's fate, as I was traveling in the leftmost lane.

If this man had a chronic illness, and if an automated emergency call had been placed before he lost control of his vehicle, could the hazardous episode have been prevented? It was a question worth pondering with Ford's announcement on Wednesday that it was experimenting with in-car health apps.

Working with [WellDoc](#), a start-up developer of software-based health management tools, Ford has created a prototype system that could monitor health issues like congestive heart failure and asthma, then display and transmit alerts if the driver is in danger.

To obtain the required information, the system uses Ford's various Sync in-car connectivity technologies, including its ability to transmit information via Bluetooth and download data from cloud services.

If the car were to receive a warning that it had entered an area with a high pollen count and the driver was highly allergic, for example, it could automatically raise its windows and start air recirculation. For diabetics, Sync could be harnessed to access the driver's personalized WellDoc database, where glucose levels would be recorded.

Some may regard this experimentation as yet another example of a company introducing a technology simply because they could, irrespective of expressed need from the marketplace.

Ford disagrees and says that it's a matter of time before this sort of service moves from the fantastical to the norm.

"For most people, drive time is private time," said K. Venkatesh Prasad, a director in Ford's vehicle design and infotronics division, in a telephone interview. "The car is the best time to listen to guidance for health and wellness."

Anand K. Iyer, the president of WellDoc, said in a telephone interview that if an app could accurately monitor the condition of diabetics and warn them, as well as health care providers, of a drop in blood sugar or the onset of insulin shock, improved driver safety and reduced insurance costs would result.

There are no plans to bring these technologies to market, but Ford researchers say that Sync is an ideal platform on which to build.

"We want to speak to the better-world approach to the business," Mr. Prasad said. "This is the car that cares."