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Business

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GLOBE STAFF

Fitbit enthusiasts know the satisfaction that comes with taking that 10-thousandth step. Now many of them can share that pride instantly with their physicians.

Westborough-based eClinicalWorks, one of the largest companies selling electronic health records to medical practices, has launched a software feature to link dozens of popular consumer devices — including fitness trackers, scales, and blood sugar monitors — into patient records. The program will allow the 35 million people on eClinicalWorks' patient Web portal to choose to share more information than ever with their doctors.

Physicians will be able to see who is active and who is not, who is keeping blood pressure under control, and who is gaining weight. Such data sharing can help patients become more involved in their health and give physicians better insight into patients' lifestyles, allowing them to provide better guidance and care, health care technology specialists say.

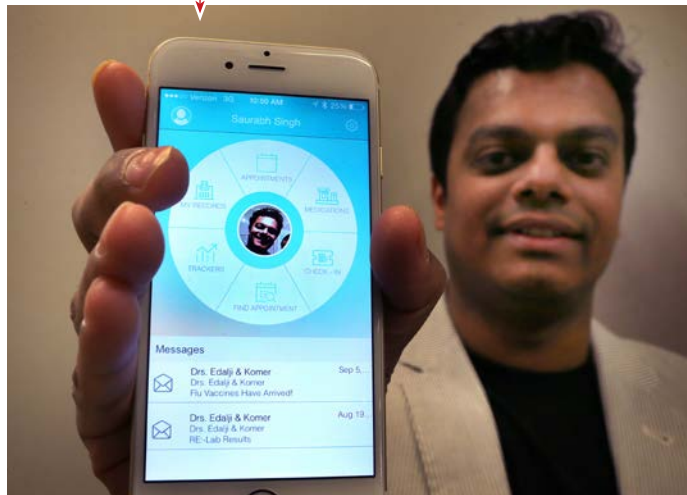
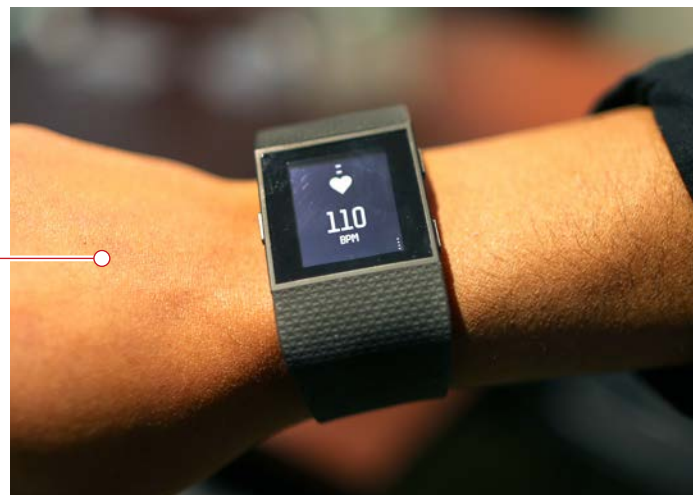
"It will be part of the picture of how to treat you," said Girish Navani, chief executive of eClinicalWorks.

The company, which serves more than 800 medical practices in Massachusetts, has spent \$75 million and several years developing



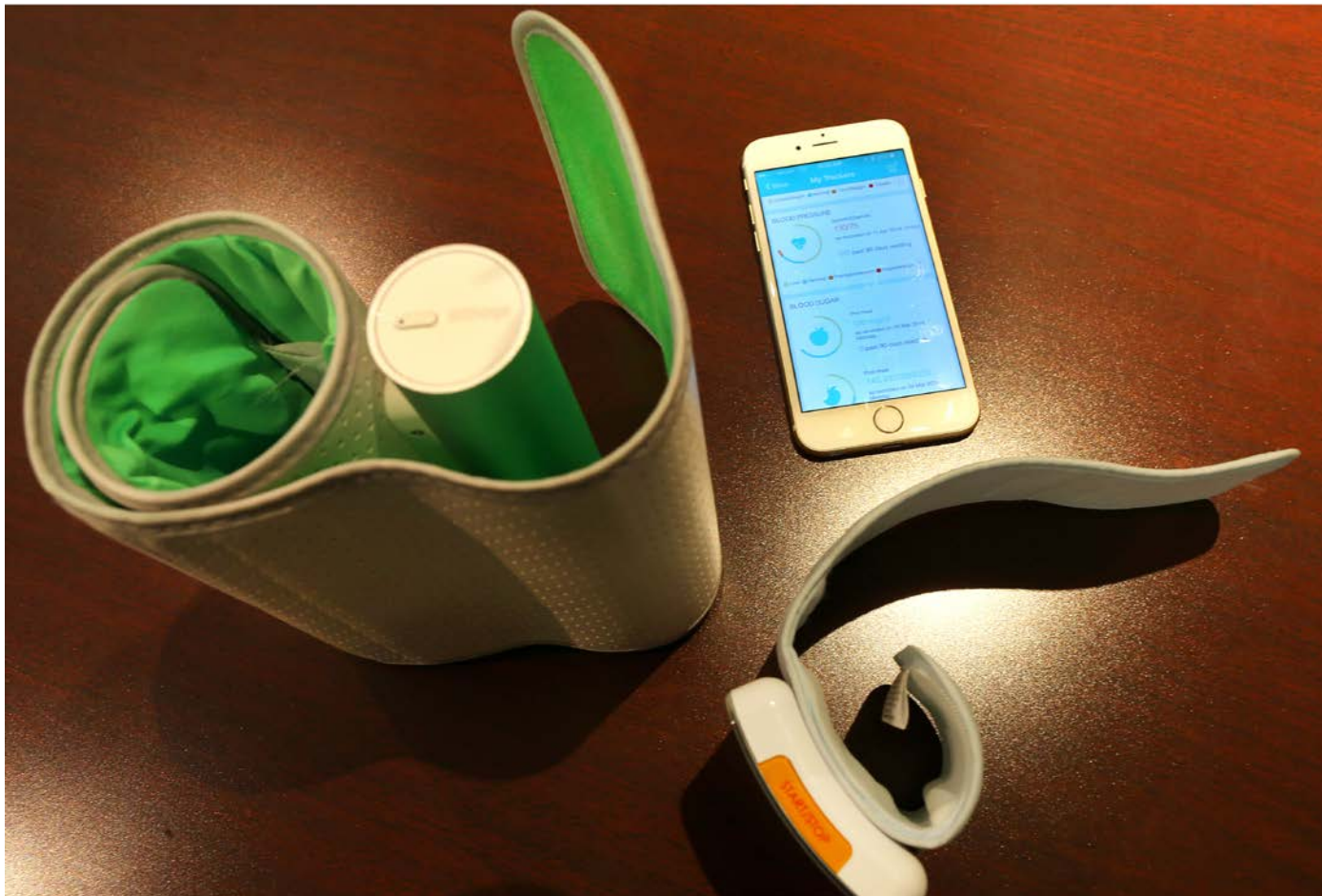
DIRECT TO YOUR DOCTOR

Westborough's eClinicalWorks syncs its health records software with wearable fitness device data



PHOTOS BY JOHN TLUMACKI FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Saurabh R. Singh shows what data from a Fitbit heart monitor (left) looks like after the monitor's information is transmitted to an app developed by eClinicalWorks.



JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF

Two wearable blood-pressure monitors can send their data to a smartphone app, then off to the doctor.

a Web and mobile application, called healow, that allows patients to see their health records from computers and smartphones. The app will now sync with data from wearable health-and-wellness devices made by Fitbit, Jawbone, Withings, and iHealth Lab. The devices include activity trackers, blood pressure cuffs, glucometers that measure blood sugar, and scales, with retail prices ranging from less than \$20 to \$150.

When a patient goes for a walk, or weighs herself on a smart scale, or checks her blood sugar with a smart glucometer, the information collected will go not only to the app connected with that device (the Fitbit app, for example) but also to the eClinicalWorks health record. Doctors can see the data in real time when they click on a patient's record. The software will chart the numbers so doctors can see unusual readings, such as a spike in blood pressure, that may require intervention.

The push to collect and consolidate patient data comes as the health care industry moves away from the traditional model of paying doctors for every service they perform to compensating them for keeping patients healthy and out of hospitals. To that end, this kind of information can help

avoid costly hospital stays if complications are identified earlier, particularly among patients suffering from chronic diseases such as diabetes and congestive heart failure.

"Payment reform has to go hand in hand with the use of technology," Navani said.

The initiative by eClinicalWorks to integrate wearable devices into patient records is the largest of its kind by an electronics health records company, according to Navani, but other efforts are underway. Boston-based Partners HealthCare, for example, has conducted pilot programs involving wearable devices, targeting patients it believes will benefit the most — those with chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension who need to track their health daily.

"It's not just the wearables, it's how you use them," said Dr. Joseph C. Kvedar, vice president of connected health at Partners.

Laura Jennings-Cranford is one of the Partners patients who tried a Fitbit tracker through a fitness challenge held by her doctor in 2013. Knowing that her doctor could see her progress, Jennings-Cranford, 73, made an effort to stay on her feet more often.

"It helps with motivation," said the Charlestown resident, who has mild diabetes, takes medication to control her blood

pressure and cholesterol, and is trying to lose weight. "My main problem is staying motivated."

At Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, chief information officer Dr. John D. Halamka is experimenting with a similar approach. He is working on a program that not only tracks patient data but tells doctors and nurses when to call or visit a patient to prevent a complication that could lead to an emergency room visit or hospital stay.

"What we want to get over to the doctors is not the raw data, but the alerts," Halamka said. "What are you going to do with 100 completely normal blood pressures?"

Still, Shari Crooker, practice administrator at Gwinnett Center Medical Associates in Lawrenceville, Ga., is encouraging all patients to jump on the wearables bandwagon. Crooker, whose practice uses eClinicalWorks records, told her patients about the company's initiative in an e-mail blast.

"It's hard for us to make a patient compliant," Crooker said. "[This] gets them involved in their own health."

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