

BetaBoston

Fitness trackers watch MS patients' routines

→ Study helps assess ability to walk, aids management of condition

By Nidhi Subbaraman

GLOBE STAFF

Difficulty walking is one of many symptoms facing the 2.3 million people with multiple sclerosis. But a wrist-worn fitness tracker paired with a smartphone app could help monitor their condition and fitness routine, according to a study conducted by researchers from Cambridge pharmaceutical company Biogen and the on-line patient community Patients Like Me.

The two organizations collaborated on the project, an investigation to test if wearable devices could reliably assist people living with MS. The partnership benefits both of them.

For Biogen, it is part of a broad push to invest in technologies that can improve the daily health of patients with MS. The company is also working with Cleveland Clinic to build an iPad app that could serve as an in-clinic diagnostic tool.

For Cambridge-based Patients Like Me, which hosts forums for patients to share information about medications, side effects, and symptoms, the project allows its members to contribute to medical research. Patients Like Me recently began allowing members to link and display activity data from their Fitbit trackers.

An MS patient's ability to walk is traditionally assessed by doctors in a clinic during a half-hour appointment.

But "in the real world, the pavements in Boston are icy, there are stairs, and you don't only have to walk 25 feet," said Paul Wicks, vice president of innovation at Patients Like Me.

Using a monitoring device could offer a long-term view of a patient's fitness habits, granting them more personalized care. For researchers who have access to thousands of cases like this, it could provide deeper understanding about the day-to-day reality of living with the disease.

The researchers contacted the more than 1,000 members of the Patients Like Me MS community and filled the study within a day, said Jane Rhodes, director of new initiatives at Biogen.

About 250 people responded and were sent Fitbit fitness trackers. Of those, 203 accepted the conditions and agreed to share their data with the Patients Like Me researchers for three weeks.

Though nearly half the group had never used an activity tracker before, 55 percent said in a survey that it changed their health routine, and 68 percent said they believed such tracking would help them manage their condition. The team will share preliminary findings at the annual American Academy of Neurology conference in Washington, D.C., this week.

The so-called quantified self community is active online, but Wicks said there is a perspective that is missing: Most blogs feature "healthy 20-something Silicon Valley men," who probably don't experience the same conditions as MS patients in their daily lives.

Though nearly half the group had never used an activity tracker before, 55 percent said that it changed their health routine, and 68 percent said they believed such tracking would help them manage their condition.

"It may not be a great idea for someone with MS to walk 10,000 steps in Boston in the snow," for example, Wicks said.

The Biogen-Patients Like Me research project is the most recent example of big company partnerships that are making it easier to for researchers to access data collected using wearable fitness trackers. On Monday, Apple announced a partnership with IBM, the terms of which suggest it will offer its Watson Health platform as a storage house for data collected from Apple's HealthKit platform. This week, Apple also open the doors to its own clinical trial platform, ResearchKit, which allows researchers to build apps that allow anyone anywhere to download it and participate in a trial.

Nidhi Subbaraman can be reached at [nidhi.subbaraman@globe.com](mailto:nidhi.subbaraman@globe.com). Follow her on Twitter @NidhiSubs.

Lose It! partners with Rise to take off pounds

→ Coaches add a human element to weight loss tracking app

By Janelle Nanos

GLOBE STAFF

Lose It!, the Boston-based meal-tracking app, announced Wednesday it is teaming up with Rise, a dieting app that links users with nutritionists and health coaches. The partnership signals the first time Lose It! will incorporate a human element directly into its weight-loss tracking efforts, which the company claims have so far have helped over 24 million people lose 40 million pounds.

Tracking caloric intake has been proven to help people lose weight, in part because being aware of just how many calories are in that Big Mac can help people make better food choices. But research has also shown having a coach can be instrumental in long-term weight management efforts. A 2011 study conducted at Johns Hopkins Medical Center found that obese patients who worked with health coaches, either online or by phone,

managed to lose an average of 5 percent of their body weight, and kept the weight off for two years.

Lose It! has a dashboard-like tool, Ascend, that allows health professionals to track their client's daily eating habits. But with the partnership, users can now import their Lose It! food information directly into Rise, where they can interact with a coach on a daily basis.

"We love the idea of coaching, and we think it's really powerful," Lose It! chief executive Charles Teague said. "We're excited to be making progress in that area for our users."

For \$48 a month, Rise pairs its users with nutritionists who offer guidance on healthy snacking and meal planning. Its users check into the app between 25 and 30 times a week, and they've logged over 1 million meals since launching in 2013. The company's roster of advisers is impressive — Harvard Medical School professor Russ Phillips, White House Innovation Fellow Adam Dole, and Sanjay Gupta, CNN's health correspondent and brother of Rise chief executive and founder Suneel Gupta.

"This is great for Lose It! users because it gives them another tool to lose weight, or reach whatever health goals they're working toward," Suneel Gupta said. "Health and fitness technology is great at measuring and tracking people's data and giving them a quantified view into their activity or diet. Rise's coaching adds a layer of personalized advice and context on top of that that will help users make informed decisions, reach their goals, and build healthy, sustainable habits for life."

Janelle Nanos can be reached at [janelle.nanos@globe.com](mailto:janelle.nanos@globe.com). Follow her on Twitter @janelleannanos and on [betaboston.com](http://betaboston.com).



Dr. Sanjay Gupta, CNN's health correspondent, is one of the elite coaches on Rise's roster.

These stories and other coverage of Boston's technology and biotech scene can be found at the [Globe's BetaBoston.com](http://Globe's BetaBoston.com) site.

EIGHT HIGH AMBITIONS

The Boston skyline could soon have a startling new addition as eight development teams vie for the rights to build a skyscraper at the site of the closed city-owned Winthrop Square Garage. Each of the eight propose building a version of a tall mixed-use tower, but their visions for the area — detailed below — vary widely. BY DAN ADAMS



**DEVELOPER:** Millennium Partners  
**ARCHITECT:** Handel Architects LLP  
**HEIGHT:** 750 feet

Millennium, best known for the 60-story Millennium Tower currently under construction downtown, wants to build a 750-foot skyscraper on the Winthrop Square site. The building would include 360 residential units. However, nearly half of its total area, 325,000 square feet, would be office space. Lower stories would include 41,000 square feet of retail space. The developer said in its application that it would partner with the Asian Community Development Corporation and commit \$10 million toward affordable housing in Chinatown.



**DEVELOPER:** Trans National Properties LLC  
**ARCHITECT:** CBT / Childs Bertman Tsekaras Inc.  
**HEIGHT:** 740 feet

Trans National Properties head Steve Belkin knows the Winthrop Square property well, having proposed building Boston's tallest skyscraper here 10 years ago. That project died amid the recession and worries that the 1,000-foot building would interfere with air traffic. His new plan, led by former Normandy Real Estate Partners bigwig Justin Krebs, is for a staggering 1.5 million-square-foot tower, standing 740 feet tall and spanning 54 stories. The project would use abutting property at 133 Federal St. that Belkin owns, creating a "much larger and more dramatic development." His highly detailed proposal includes plans for 700,000 square feet of office space, plus condos, apartments, retail space, a sculpture park, and a public "Entrepreneur Innovation Center" on the first and second floors.



**DEVELOPER:** Accordia Partners LLC  
**ARCHITECT:** SHoP Architects, with Hacin + Associates  
**HEIGHT:** 750 feet / 56 stories

Accordia, in partnership with Ares Management and Starwood Hotels, is proposing a 750-foot, 56-story glass tower that gently twists and tapers towards its apex. The 800,000-square-foot building would include a 275-room Le Meridien hotel, along with condos, retail, and meeting spaces, and a large public gallery on the ground floor. In its proposal, Accordia touted its status as an African-American-owned company, and said it would partner with minority investors and contractors to work on the tower. The project would cost around \$530 million, the company said.



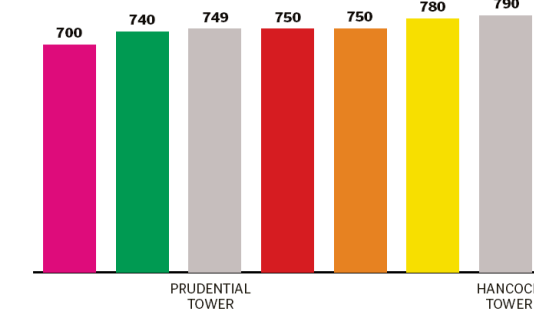
**DEVELOPER:** Trinity Winthrop Square LLC  
**ARCHITECT:** The Architectural Team  
**HEIGHT:** 51 stories

Trinity is proposing a 51-story mixed-use project with a 276-room destination hotel, 328 luxury apartments, and 261 luxury condos. About 6.5 percent of the residences would be affordable, the developer said; Trinity also wants fees it pays to the city to go toward affordable housing in East Boston. The development would include a two-level restaurant along Devonshire Street, two additional retail spaces, and a black box theater. GB Lodging, known for its Ace Hotels in New York and Palm Springs, would develop the hotel.



Boston's 700 club

The height of some of the proposed skyscrapers compared with two downtown landmarks:



Passion

Her list makes it easier to plan a party

In Boston event planning circles, Dianne Butt is known as "the secret list lady."

But that's a bit of a misnomer. Yes, Butt does maintain a list that's highly coveted by local event planners. But it's no secret.

The origin of the list dates to 1997, when Butt (whose first name is pronounced DEE-on) moved from New York, where she owned a special events planning firm, to Boston, where she could not find a comprehensive list of the dates and locations of all nonprofit fundraisers in the area. That's critical for event organizers trying to avoid overlap, yet it was nowhere to be found.

"In Manhattan, you could make three phone calls and get that information," said the 67-year-old Weston resident. "In Boston, you had to call every hotel and every nonprofit, and even then you weren't sure what you were up against because some people were having their events at historic sites or museums."

And that, Butt said, "drove me crazy." So she took it upon herself to develop that missing list. Nearly two decades later, it contains more than

1,000 annual events ranging from nonprofit galas to charity races to fund-raising luncheons. She estimates it captures 90 percent of all major nonprofit events happening in and around Boston — not bad for a city that used to have no master list at all.

It also includes commencements and big public gatherings, since those can fill hotels and snarl traffic. Butt, who teaches event management at Lasell College, compiles the list in her spare time by accepting submissions and combing through every calendar listing she can find. And as long as nonprofits share their event information with her, she shares her list with them for free in a weekly e-mail.

Over the years, she has also developed a free listserv that has grown into an advice forum and job board for the nonprofit sector.

As she likes to say: "It's my gift to Boston!" SACHA PFEIFFER

Know someone pursuing a work project that isn't about the money? Tell us about it at [yourstorehere@globe.com](mailto:yourstorehere@globe.com).

Google target of EU on two legal fronts

→ Favoritism in searches and bullying on Android alleged

By Raf Casert and Michael Liedtke

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BRUSSELS — The European Union's escalating legal attack on Google is likely to ignite a debate about whether the Internet search leader makes life more convenient for consumers or abuses its power to squeeze out rivals who might have something better to offer.

The contrasting views of Google's business practices came into sharper focus Wednesday after Europe's anti-trust regulators challenged the Mountain View, Calif., company on two different fronts.

Drawing upon a nearly five-year probe, the regulators filed a complaint alleging that Google has been improperly favoring its own shopping comparison service in its own search results. The charges could still be expanded to include other services highlighted in Google's search results, such as travel recommendations and merchant reviews, mounting a challenge to the digital advertising system that generates most of the company's revenue.

As if that blow was not enough, Europe's regulators also announced they are opening a separate inquiry into whether Google has been illegally using its popular Android software to bully smartphone and tablet makers to feature Google's products on their mobile devices.

Google staunchly denied any wrongdoing, setting up a showdown that could take years to resolve. The



JOHN THYS/AP/GETTY IMAGES

'Dominant companies have a responsibility not to abuse their powerful market position.'

MARGRETHE VESTAGER  
EU competition commissioner

company has 10 weeks to respond to Wednesday's complaint.

If regulators can prove Google has been breaking the law in the European Union's 28-country bloc, it could be costly even for a firm as rich as Google.

The EU can impose fines of 10 percent of annual revenue, or some \$6 billion in Google's case, and force the company to overhaul its system for recommending websites in Europe.

The EU executive commission said it found that Google "gives systematic favorable treatment" to its Google Shopping at the expense of others in its general search results.

Margrethe Vestager, the EU's competition commissioner, said that was a problem because Google is so dominant in Europe. It has a market share of more than 90 percent of Internet searches in the EU, compared with about 70 percent in the United States.

"It is not based on the merits of Google Shopping that Google Shopping always comes up first," Vestager said. "Dominant companies have a responsibility not to abuse their powerful market position."

Though Wednesday's charges centered on the shopping service, the EU said it is pursuing other antitrust issues against Google, including an inquiry into its online ad business.

That suggests the EU's case against Google could become as big as the decade-long battle it waged with Microsoft, which ended up paying a total of about \$2.3 billion in fines.

"Clearly every company needs to obey the same legal rules of the road," Microsoft said in a Wednesday statement. The software maker is among the companies that spurred the EU's investigation of Google.

In the separate investigation into Android, the EU alleges that Google is breaking the rules by obstructing rival operating systems, applications, and services.

Amrit Singhal, the senior vice president for Google Search, said that "while Google may be the most used search engine, people can now find and access information in numerous different ways — and allegations of harm, for consumers and competitors, have proved to be wide of the mark."