

Wireless Glucose Meter Can Be a Lifesaving Connection for Many

San Diego Business Journal

ENTRA HEALTH SYSTEMS INC.

CEO: Richard Strobridge.

Financial information: Growth rate is 100 percent a year for the past four years.

No. of local employees: Six.

Investors: Three co-founders, including Strobridge.

Headquarters: Mission Valley.

Year founded: 2006.

What makes the company innovative: One of the first medical device startups to develop a wireless glucose meter, a technology that makes it easier for diabetics to monitor their health.

Ten percent of the worlds population suffers from diabetes - nearly 9 percent in the U.S. - in large part due to the obesity problem sweeping the developed nations.

However, diabetes sufferers who monitor their blood sugar cost the health care system a tenth as much as those who dont - \$6,000 a year versus \$60,000 in the U.S., which puts a big dent in the \$150 billion spent each year on the disease.

So, in 2006, Richard Strobridge, the company CEO, and his two partners, Larry Mahar, the chief technology officer, and John Hendel, the company chairman, launched Entra Health Systems Inc., with the goal of developing a wireless device to track blood sugar and relay readings to a mobile phone or desktop browser.

Disease Hits Home

The three founders "all have diabetes in our families," said Strobridge, "so we decided that the growing pandemic of diabetes, which is also at the root of a lot of other afflictions in terms of complications, such as heart disease and kidney failure, would be a good place to start on."

At first, they attempted to make a monitoring system for cell phones, but the technology was changing so rapidly that the three decided to pursue a separate, portable meter with an embedded Bluetooth chip that can relay blood sugar levels

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wirelessly.

The technology is similar to the hands-free ear pieces consumers use to talk on their mobile phones. The readings are sent to a doctor or other care provider in the form of a text message.

"The wireless blood glucose meter helps family stay connected with family members or medical providers, such as doctors," said Strobridge. "It helps patients (providing them) with the tools to monitor their health, and it saves treatment costs for public and private health care."

Strobridge says Entra Health Systems, which he calls "a niche player," is going up against the likes of the "big four:" Bayer Healthcare LLC, Abbott Laboratories, F. Hoffmann-La Roche Ltd. and Johnson & Johnson Services Inc.

They command 80 percent of the glucose testing market.

However, "they dont have wireless meters," said Strobridge, "so were very unique from that viewpoint."

Strobridge says the meter has been approved in a number of countries, including the U.S., Australia, Germany, India, South Korea and the United Arab Emirates.

In the U.S., Strobridge says his medical device startup has struck deals with Verizon Wireless, and with medical services and product provider McKesson Corp., based in San Francisco.

As a result the privately held company has been growing 100 percent a year over the past four years, with some of the revenue coming from other intellectual property.

The glucose monitoring system is a godsend for many patients.

Liberating Technology

Strobridge gives the example of a 17-year-old girl, who can now travel, even overseas, and still closely track blood sugar levels.

If she runs into problems, he says, her parents and her doctor are notified immediately, and they can help her adjust her insulin doses.

Adult children can monitor insulin levels in a diabetic parent, he adds. The elderly, and particularly the Baby Boom generation, have greater risk of coming down with diabetes.

Brian Dolan, editor of MobiHealthNews.com, says Entra Health Systems has been an innovator in diabetes management, through "the basic functionality of their device - connecting a meter to a mobile phone is not a new idea."

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"They were the first company to have an app in an app store - in this case, Nokia Corp.'s Ovi Store - that displayed data from a connected blood glucose meter on a mobile phone app," he said. A "deal with Telstra, the big mobile operator in Australia, for the device and mobile app was also one of the highest profile deals in mobile health care, especially for diabetes care."

Strobridge, who once worked at SAIC as a consultant, is a serial entrepreneur, having previously sold a medical device business to Stryker Corp.

The company has a licensing agreement with TouchTrak Systems Inc. of Laguna Beach to market an electronic kiosk used in hospitals and clinics to automate patient management.

In the future, Strobridge says the company could add other monitoring devices to the lineup, such as a heart monitor.

Cardiac diseases are closely linked to diabetes, he says, along with several other conditions.

"We've got to be more efficient, we've got to do more with less," Strobridge said. "Telecommunications technologies are a way to do that, so I see us being a strong player in mobile health and helping patients communicate with their care team."

Tom York is a contributing editor for the San Diego Business Journal.

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