Meet Skin Analytics, the company using artificial intelligence to detect skin cancer

As part of our Quick Fire Questions - or QFQs - we spoke to Neil Daly, CEO of Skin Analytics, about using AI to detect skin cancer, using technology to design efficient patient pathways, and combatting dermatologist shortages,

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What was the catalyst for launching Skin Analytics?

As an Australian who grew up by the beach, skin cancer, the importance of sun safety, and regular skin checks were extremely visible to me growing up. It's (understandably) very much ingrained in the culture. Equally, as I got older more of my family and friends were getting skin cancers and it seemed like an area where we could do something better.

I also wanted to do something that really mattered to me and doing something about cancer felt important having had it affect people I care about.

I founded _Skin Analytics_ in 2012 after a career in mobile innovation and consulting. I thought AI was going to be one of the most exciting innovation

fields and I felt there was an opportunity to create a solution that would reduce patient wait times and assist in early diagnostics.

Tell me about the business – what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

Skin Analytics is a healthtech company that uses AI to find skin cancer. Our AI, DERM, uses machine learning to recognise the most common malignant, pre-malignant and benign skin lesions including melanoma, the most dangerous of the common skin cancers and the fifth most common cancer in the UK. We use DERM to build patient pathways with our partner hospitals or care providers, designed to accelerate patient diagnosis. Our goal is to help accelerate finding skin cancers which can significantly impact patient outcomes and free up capacity for overstretched dermatologists.

How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

We launched in 2012 and were initially very R&D focused, investing heavily in building proprietary AI algorithms that specifically solved the problems of skin. We also invested in building clinical evidence and regulatory expertise and processes into our business early. This slow and steady approach was contentious at the time but these foundations are increasingly recognised as the essential building blocks of businesses like ours. It's these foundations that serve us so well as we now deploy our solutions commercially to help real patients.

We're used by five NHS Trusts and have seen more than 25,000 real patients. We're also delighted to say that as of last month, DERM achieved a Class IIa UKCA mark, the first and only AI based dermatology product to achieve this.

How are you funded?

We were initially supported by an amazing group of angel investors as well as competitive grants as we moved through the R&D phase. More recently as we commercialise, we received venture funding from top tier investors Hoxton Ventures, NESTA Partners and Mustard Seed Ventures. We're just about to do

another funding round now to keep accelerating our growth.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

One of the biggest challenges is the perception of AI but the reality is that in it we have an incredibly powerful tool that can be a multiplicative factor in our ability to deliver high quality care.

Ultimately AI will support health systems in designing more efficient and effective patient pathways that use technology for what it's good at – finding the patients that need care – while using our incredible clinicians for what they are good at – figuring out the best way to get the right outcome for each patient.

There is a sense that AI has been developed without clinicians but from our very earliest days we've been working closely with clinicians with expertise across primary care, dermatology and important public health. Each have different perspectives but are critical inputs into designing something that will actually create value for patients and the health system itself.

Oh and one final challenge we see – the sense that AI is a commodity. It is very very difficult to build AI models that solve health problems and in dermatology there are even more challenges around the digitisation of data. We urge anyone looking to deploy AI in healthcare to demand real world data or prospective studies at the very least.

How does Skin Analytics answer an unmet need?

Skin cancer rates are doubling around the world every 10-20 years and dermatology posts are often unfilled due to significant dermatologist shortages. Early diagnosis is indisputably the biggest factor in cancer survival rates and Skin Analytics provides dramatic increases in access and reduction in costs for accessing skin cancer assessments.

What's in store for the future?

We're delighted to secure Class IIa status in the UK, expanding how we can deliver our technology to better serve patients. We'll continue working with our partners to deliver new innovative ways to do that. Beyond that, we're

expanding internationally to other health systems that similarly have the same challenge to delivering high quality dermatology care affordably. Watch this space!

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

If you have ambitions in healthcare, then focus on your foundations and understand what your outcomes need to be. Diagnostic accuracy is table stakes, being able to drive cost effectiveness is also critical. We spend a huge amount of national wealth on healthcare in every country. It's unsustainable and we need more innovators to help build a better future of care.

Finally, the only characteristic I've seen in every single founder I've met is resilience. It's a rollercoaster ride and some of it is deeply unpleasant, but nothing worth doing is ever easy.

Neil Daly is CEO of _Skin Analytics_.

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