

Meet Harper, providing hyper-personalised mental health support by combining the power of AI with human empathy

As part of our quick fire questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Mithi Thaya, CEO and cofounder of Harper about mental health support for patients undergoing medical treatment, translational research and well-evidenced wellness plans.

Mental health is one of the least understood fields of medicine. Yet over 1 billion people live with some sort of mental health condition, from mild to severe, without even including the huge number of people who haven't been diagnosed.

Further, mental health is strongly correlated with downstream physical illness and health conditions, ranging from cardiovascular diseases, to faster ageing, to infertility or delayed fertility. In fact, the World Health Foundation predicts that by 2030, depression will be the greatest cause of disability globally

Harper was born to address this growing challenge that faces the entire planet, improving human healthspan by alleviating mental health as a contributing factor of disease.

Tell me about the business

Harper provides hyper-personalised mental health support to patients undergoing medical treatment by combining the power of AI with human empathy.

We improve the well-being of our users through our three pillars of care:

1. Understanding: wellness questions to find out what keeps them feeling their best
2. Supporting: regular chats with Harper coaches to discuss how they're doing and set achievable goals
3. Guiding: tailored, science-backed activities to build healthy habits and help them respond to whatever comes their way

Currently, we are working with leading fertility clinics in the UK and US to support the mental health of their patients undergoing fertility treatment.

Our longer-term ambition is to work with healthcare providers outside of fertility to provide this powerful framework and address the needs of patients suffering from a variety of health conditions. These include the 500 million people suffering from cardiovascular diseases worldwide and the 770 million with Irritable Bowel Syndrome.

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

Harper is in essence translational research. Starting as a research project a few years back when we put together a team of scientists, clinicians and technologists to study the correlation between mental and physical health through peer-reviewed research and large-scale epidemiological datasets.

From an understanding of the science, we identified an unmet patient need and developed a care framework leveraging computational AI, human interaction and precision medicine.

How are you funded?

Earlier in 2022, Harper announced closing a \$6.5M raise, which was our first round of funding.

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

The first step is often the most challenging! Particularly when providing such vital well-being support, it's essential that the product is rigorously tested, again and again, before it's rolled out to our users.

Fortunately, we have an incredible team of clinicians, scientists and technologists who worked tremendously hard to ensure that our framework and product are perfectly suited to respond to the needs of our users. Through pilots with our excellent clinic partners, we have been able to create an offering that we are immensely proud of that has already been able to deliver a huge amount of value to the fertility patients using it.

How does Harper answer an unmet need?

Currently, mental healthcare is not:

- Objective, lacking patient-centric accurate detection tools

- Preventative, primarily reacting to moments of crisis and dependent on the diagnosis of conditions

- Accessible, with high costs driven up by a heavy reliance on therapist hours

By leveraging cutting-edge digital and biological indicators of well-being, we are able to accurately and objectively understand the well-being of our users quickly and without the need for therapy. This allows us to provide truly personalised support through our well-evidenced wellness plans and regular coaching sessions.

What's in store for the future?

We'll soon announce our latest partnerships with fertility clinics in the UK and US. Stay tuned for more announcements on upcoming products that will provide well-being support in two further healthcare verticals.

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

It all starts with your users and customers! Often as a founder it's easy to provide the solution you think people need, but that's not always what's best for them. Spend time getting to know the people you're hoping to serve, build a deep understanding of their needs and problems, and build the solution that works for them.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

My daily routine consists of 5 things which have remained consistent, spread across the morning and evening as the rest of the day is usually dedicated to my team, clinics and investors:

I go for a power walk with my dog which helps both my mental and physical health

I practice transcendental meditation for 20 min every morning to prepare my day

Passionate about longevity, I practice intermittent fasting until early afternoon

I study brazilian jiu jitsu in the evenings

I read for an hour a day just before bed

Mithi Thaya is CEO and cofounder of Harper.