

Meet Doccla, the virtual ward keeping patients out of hospital unless they absolutely need to be there

As part of our quick fire questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Martin Ratz, cofounder of Doccla about unexpected catalysts for growth and development, virtual wards and solving the problem of "bed blockers."

What was the catalyst for launching Doccla?

My unexpected heart attack a few years ago. As well as going through a deeply emotive experience, I realised that once you leave the hospital there is hardly any monitoring of patients – even though we have technology that enables it. After feeling the effects of this first hand, coupled with 15 years of working with public healthcare providers across Europe and witnessing the vast problem caused by "bed blockers" – patients in the hospital who do not need to be there – I realised there had to be a better way forward for patients and providers alike.

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

Doccla is a virtual ward company. We exist to keep patients out of hospital unless it is absolutely necessary for them to be there. Using new remote monitoring technology, we enable the early discharge of patients from hospitals while reducing the need for those with long-term or chronic health conditions to visit hospitals in the first place.

Doccla's offering covers the entire patient journey. The service includes a tailor-made box of equipment, which includes pre-configured smartphones with a large font that is easier to read for those with bad vision, and wearable medical devices that can measure a wide range of physiological parameters such as heart rate, respiration rate, body temperature, spO2, and blood pressure. We then keep track of patients' vital signs and follow an agreed clinical escalation protocol, while patients remain safely at home. This allows busy clinicians to focus on patients who need their attention at the hospital.

Our vision is to be a virtual hospital – a command center – where patients can be monitored wherever they are and across a wide range of clinical conditions. We also see applications of our service for the pharmaceutical industry to conduct virtual clinical trials and research supported by data.

Our clients are large healthcare providers and their commissioners. For example, we work with multiple clients from the UK National Health Service.

In Europe, most healthcare is publicly funded which means that we contract customers by winning competitive public tenders. They are hard to win (we've been very lucky to win nearly all we have entered) and often run for several years.

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

Doccla launched in 2019. Our first client was a research project to remotely monitor heart patients and correlate their vital signs with unplanned clinical events. We had just gone through the ethics committee (necessary to conduct research) and were supposed to recruit our first patient in February 2020. Then the pandemic hit. All non-essential research – like ours – was immediately put

on hold.

Within days, in close cooperation with the hospital that hosted our research study – who we had a great relationship with – we set up a virtual ward and started to monitor COVID-19 patients. The pandemic was an extraordinary catalyst for us as it demonstrated how efficient, necessary, and immensely helpful our solution is. COVID-19 forced Doccla to scale at a much faster rate than we thought possible and it showed our partners the full scope and potential of virtual wards. Today, Doccla, is present in 20% of all Integrated Care Systems (ICS) in the UK, with patient intake from 20+ hospitals.

Tell us about the working culture at Doccla

It's one of the things we are most proud of. Our team is genuinely – really, really, really! – phenomenal and has been instrumental in helping us to build a beautiful culture that underpins everything we do at Doccla. We're obsessively customer-centered, entrepreneurial, and results-oriented and this is thanks to the people we manage to attract. As my cofounder Dag Larsson states: we're a team, rather than family. Meaning that we work hard, together, as a team and expect everyone to perform. Unlike family ties, they are (almost) unconditional.

How are you funded?

For me, having a “revenue first” approach has always been critical. We were cash-flow positive in our first year. It's very important to prove that we add value and there is no greater validation of this than when customers are willing to pay for our offering. We decided to bring in external investors after two years, in order to grow faster and meet the demand we have seen whilst offering an even better service.

Now we are backed by wonderful investors at General Catalyst, Speedinvest, Giant and KHP Ventures (we announced our series A in September 2022). They are phenomenal and very supportive.

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

Bringing about behavioural change. It's really hard, especially in a regulated healthcare environment. We have a multi-layered approach and work

extremely closely with our clients to support them. For example, we send our nurses to hospital to support clinicians in the discharge process. We also task-shift whatever we can from busy clients to ourselves.

How does Doccla answer an unmet need?

As opposed to traditional patient monitoring technology, Doccla provides a comprehensive end-to-end solution which covers software integration, logistics and customer service, as well as tech support for the elderly and non-digital natives – therefore differentiating ourselves from our competitors by significantly reducing the workload on hospital staff. With the majority of our patients being older – and often tech illiterate – Doccla enjoys one of the highest customer-compliance rates in the industry, exceeding 95%.

Doccla enables patients to continue their care journey in the comfort of their own home. Crucially, our solution frees up hospital beds, reduces costs, and alleviates the immense pressures on healthcare systems, while keeping patients safe at home without them needing to go to hospital.

What's in store for the future?

Continue to do what we do. Expand to more geographies and adjacent market segments, further develop our tech stack, increase our clinical offering, develop sophisticated analytics and AI tools. Above all, we will remain customer-centric and continue focusing on our mission of keeping patients out of hospitals.

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

Engage in potential client dialogue at the outset and always, always, maintain it. That way you ensure that you have a product that fits the market.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules

you're living by at the moment?

As a father of three young boys and a busy work life, maintaining a daily routine is not always easy. However, a few things have gradually become part of my daily routine which have certainly helped me stay focused and resolute.

For my work-life balance, I block time in my calendar for exercise at least three times per week. And I stick to it, sometimes I can exchange one day for another.

To stay organised and on top of things, I always make to-do lists with monthly objectives to reduce the risk of not staying on target.

Lastly, to switch off from time to time, I regularly listen to podcasts that are not in any way related to my work.

Martin Ratz is the cofounder of [Doccla](#).

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