

Meet Oxford Medical Products, creating accessible and affordable weight loss products

As part of our quick fire questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Camilla Easter, CEO of Oxford Medical Products about obesity, empowering individuals to achieve their weightloss goals, and the importance of doing things differently.

Obesity is one of the world's largest public health crises, shortening lives and causing other serious diseases including cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Current treatments are unsuitable for most of the 2 billion people affected by excessive weight. OMP was established to create a solution that would be suitable, accessible and affordable for the hundreds of millions of people living with obesity and excess weight. We looked at all the current treatment options and were struck by how successful bariatric surgery is on an individual basis, but it is too invasive and prohibitively expensive for the majority of people. We set about designing a solution that would work like bariatric surgery, but that could be taken at home, with minimal medical input. This would ensure the product was accessible and affordable to those seeking help with their weight loss journey.

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

OMP aims to empower individuals to achieve their weightloss goals, through an evidenced based medical approach. We have developed Sirona, a proprietary hydrogel which is designed to work like a gastric balloon, but comes as a pill which can be taken anywhere. The hydrogel swells in the stomach and is designed so that it should induce an instant feeling of fullness and appetite suppression. Sirona resists the stomach's harsh environment for a prolonged period before breaking down and passing naturally; the hydrogel's mechanical properties are designed to withstand the stomach's movement without damaging the stomach walls, ensuring patient comfort. Sirona lasts several days before breaking down and passing naturally with redosing on a weekly basis to ensure a continuous effect.

OMP's team is composed of a group of Medtech entrepreneurs, material scientists, surgeons and generally amazing people who are all dedicated to ensuring a better experience and treatment for people living with obesity. It is critical that everyone involved in OMP is aligned with our values and understand exactly what we're trying to achieve and why there is an urgent need for such a change.

Unfortunately, obesity is still a stigmatised disease; many health care professionals HCPs are not well trained in treating and communicating obesity, resulting in low-level patient engagement. A disruptive go-to-market strategy is required to increase acceptability and engagement in weight-loss therapies. Telemedicine opens an entirely new market segment enabling a cost-efficient, rapid, and consumer-accessible route to market. Telehealth utilisation has increased 38-fold since the start of COVID-19, with 57% of US adults preferring a telemedicine consult over a traditional one. Through targeting the out-of-pocket market via telemedicine, individuals will be able to access Sirona, safely (prescribed) easily and discreetly through home delivery. We will partner with an established telemedicine provider that already has the in-built distribution and customer bases, with the infrastructure for handling prescriptions, ensuring regulatory requirements are fulfilled and minimising product abuse.

Once the telemedicine route is established, traditional prescription and reimbursement options will be targeted to further growth. Alongside Sirona, a supporting app will be developed to personalise dosing and enhance compliance. This should promote long-term user engagement, ensuring both

good initial weight loss and long-term weight management.

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

OMP was launched in 2017. We spent two and a half years in the lab before we had a prototype that was ready for feasibility testing. Since then we have conducted all the necessary pre-clinical work and we are now focused on clinical trials which are ongoing at University Hospital Southampton NHS.

At first we solely focused on the initial treatment of obesity and weight loss. Over time however, we have realised that it is not sufficient to only help people achieve initial weight loss. We also need to support people over a much longer term to ensure weight maintenance after they have hit their target weight. Obesity is a chronic disease and should be treated as such. Therefore alongside our hydrogel hardware we are also developing a support app. The app will allow our users to track their weight and appetite, connect with other users and, seek dietary and psychological support when they are on both our weight loss and weight maintenance programs.

Tell us about the working culture at OMP

Our three core values are designed to be simple and direct:

Respect

Innovate

Excel

We are a small team of 12 and our core values are incredibly important to the culture and running of OMP. Our team is built of people who thrive in a diverse working environment and who are good at problem solving even when the problem falls out of their remit. We encourage new and innovative ideas and have a strong R&D product pipeline as a result. Flexible working (both location and hours) is used where possible to allow people to thrive in the most suitable environment for them.

How are you funded?

By a combination of amazing angels and VCs. I can regularly be heard saying

we have the best investors any start-up could hope for. Alongside our amazing Angels such as Nick Edwards and Jan Hruska, we have VCs; Ada Ventures, Nesta VC, Selvedge and OION.

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

When I tell people our story and what we're doing, all too often I hear things like, "people should just eat less", or "why do they need a medical solution? The answer to weight loss is simple". Many in our society still feel like this and they could not be more wrong. If diet and exercise were the silver bullet, it would not fail for 95% of people long term. Obesity is a very complex disease and we need better acceptance and a multimodal approach to ensure we can help the hundreds of millions of people living with obesity. Part of OMP's job is not just to create an evidenced based long term hardware solution, but also to help educate and change social norms, to de-stigmatise obesity, encourage people to seek medical help and ensure they know there are people and companies out there who understand what they are going through and want to help.

How does OMP answer an unmet need?

Sirona will be prescription-only and indicated for individuals with excessive weight (BMI >25) seeking weight loss. Whilst Sirona will be indicated for anyone overweight or obese, its entrance onto the market will be particularly beneficial for the underserved overweight proportion of the market (BMI of 25-30). Indeed, despite 40% of BMI-related deaths occurring in overweight but not obese adults, most treatment options are unavailable for these individuals; typically, the pharmaceutical treatment threshold is a BMI >30 and the surgical treatment threshold is a BMI >35. With the overweight adult population almost 3 times greater than the obese population, Sirona will offer an effective treatment to hundreds of millions of people who previously had limited options. Additionally, Sirona will offer obese individuals an effective treatment that does not have the side effects of surgery, gastric balloons or pharmacological therapies such as semaglutide and liraglutide.

Sirona improves the current market offering by combining the efficacy of bariatric surgery with improved affordability, accessibility and safety:

is designed to have enhanced efficacy compared with existing hydrogel solutions since it suppresses appetite 24/7

is non-invasive and can be taken at home

has minimal side effects – Sirona is an inert hydrogel which is not systematically absorbed

improved affordability (~£100/month for 6 months) compared with other treatments.

What's in store for the future?

We've started our first in human clinical study which will run for the majority of 2023. We will then run straight into our final human pivotal trial, which will be run across the EU/US throughout 2024. The data from the pivotal trial will be submitted to FDA/CE notified bodies for approval early 2025 before commercialisation in the middle of 2025! In conjunction, we will be scaling our manufacturing capacity to be ready to meet demand when we launch. We are also working on several very exciting projects using our core hydrogel technology to create new medical devices, such as a gastroretentive drug delivery system.

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

Do not be afraid to do things differently, especially when it comes to fundraising. There will inevitably be some very tough days and frustrating ones too! Having the ability to compartmentalise where possible will save a lot of emotional stress and ultimately leads to better problem solving.

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

Be very organised! Anything that can be dealt with that day should be dealt with that day. I have two young children (3 and 6 years old) and so I ensure I am very efficient during the day. I start with an early scan of emails and meetings for the day ahead when I wake up. I try to have two hours in the early evening where I can spend time with my children and put them to bed with no work distraction if possible. I will then pick up anything remaining in the evening to ensure the decks are clear for the start of the next day. This way I

find things do not slip and I can relax knowing I am not holding any part of any project up.

Camilla Easter is CEO of *Oxford Medical Products*.

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