

CONNECTCare, improving remote care with intuitive, accessible medicines management

As part of our quick fire questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Issa Dasu Patel cofounder and CEO of CONNECTCare about empowering patients with medicines data, working at the intersection of health and social care and ensuring medicines are not overlooked in the digital health revolution.

My family have worked in the pharmacy space for decades, so I grew up seeing first hand how vital and valuable the support of trusted community pharmacists is. After working as a digital and data advisor on the UK's first national remote monitoring programme during the pandemic, I became increasingly aware of the need to better support patients who were managing their conditions independently at home. In particular, there was a clear need for greater support around medicines. Too often, patients would be unaware of the potential side effects or interactions of their medication, leading to preventable falls or health complications that would end up with them being readmitted to hospital.

My brother, Mehfuz, and I got talking and decided to do something about it. Using our shared skill sets and expertise, we founded CONNECTCare to help

improve remote health and social care through more intuitive, accessible medicines management.

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

CONNECTCare is bridging a significant gap in digital health and care: medicines support. For patients taking multiple medicines, missing doses or errors with timings can lead to avoidable health complications or increased likelihood of falls, leading directly to hospital readmissions or the need to move into a care home setting.

We are striving to empower patients to take charge of their own health and ensure we can give everyone access to the medicines data and information they need to stay well. Fundamentally, it's about giving people the confidence to make the most of medicines.

We're helping do this using connected devices and software solutions to support patients. This includes a 'smart medicines box' that's used by patients to stay on top of their medicines. Lights and sound alerts remind patients against their prescribed schedule. Patients can also opt to receive SMS notifications to alert them when it's time to take a medicine, and carers or relatives can also be alerted if medications are repeatedly missed.

But that's just the start. To amplify this impact, we're also creating intelligent software systems that can plug-into other systems, such as those used by home carers, and make information about medicines easier to access. Our technology will also 'unlock' existing prescription data held by GPs, pharmacists and health teams and provide crucial insights, such as whether a new prescription may increase a patient's likelihood of falling.

Overall, we're digitising the "brain of pharmacist" and ensuring medicines are not overlooked in the digital health revolution.

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

We launched in late 2021 and it's been non-stop ever since. We've secured several rounds of grant funding over 2021 and 2022 and launched major

initiatives with a range of NHS and county council partners to completely redesign medicines support pathways. We are so excited to scale up these projects in 2023 and get these tools into the hands and homes of the people who need them.

Tell us about the working culture at CONNECTCare

We are currently a team of 12 and rapidly expanding! I think our workplace is made unique by the fact that, while we all come from very different walks of life and live across the UK and beyond, we are united by our mission to meaningfully improve the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in our society. We've created a workplace which is flexible, empowers individuals, and offers a culture where people can bring their authentic selves to work.

How are you funded?

To date, we've been awarded several rounds of funding by Innovate UK, the UK's national innovation agency. We're delighted to have received continued support from them, including from their inaugural Healthy Ageing Challenge. Now that our projects and contracts are underway and our mission is clearer, we're also exploring VC investment.

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

It's a big challenge trying to overcome the silos separating medical information across different services. Patients' medication information is held across multiple services – by their GP, hospitals, community care services, pharmacists, and by patients themselves. Bringing together these different sources of information in one centralised system to provide patients with informed, joined-up medicines support has never been done before. It's been exciting to take on this challenge and our ability to create this technology marks a major breakthrough in the way medication records are handled.

How does CONNECTCare answer an

unmet need?

Medicine management used to be a highly personal issue – built on relationships between people. Patients would be able to visit their pharmacist more regularly and receive detailed advice and information face-to-face. Now, with significant pressures on clinical capacity, and an increase in remote care delivery, there is a gap in support for medicine management. Patients managing their own medication from home are vulnerable to medicine mismanagement, which can increase the risk of falls or health complications and often leads to hospital readmission.

CONNECTCare is answering an unmet need by redressing this balance, placing patients at the forefront of our work and providing personalised remote medicines support. We recognise that our patients are on their own individual medical journeys, with their own complex needs. We are building a platform that re-prioritises the idea of individualised advice, working at the intersection of health and social care to give people the confidence to access optimum health outcomes at home.

What's in store for the future?

Among our existing work in Lancashire, we're currently rolling out a major government-backed pilot of our Healthy Ageing Initiative project in Oxfordshire, where we're supporting older people to manage complex medication at home and stay out of hospital. This year, we hope to scale projects such as this to support a growing number of people across the UK – continuing our mission to 'digitise the brain of a pharmacist' and empower people to confidently manage their medicines independently through simple, safe access to vital medicines information and support.

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

A piece of advice that has stood me in good stead so far is to form strong, long-term partnerships. Specifically for other founders working in health, building these partnerships with the NHS and local authorities is crucial if you are going to create an effective solution that can be successfully implemented.

Working closely with clinicians and services means that you can gain feedback about the initiative you are developing, so that it can be adjusted to meet the needs of those using the technology. Too often, technology is parachuted in without consideration for the needs of those using it. Listening to end users

from day one will ensure your solution can make a genuine improvement to services when deployed.

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

If you asked me in 2022, my answer would have been very different. My routine was largely: work all day, every day. This year, I'm trying to introduce a bit of work-life balance into my life. It's those crucial periods of reflection and down time which will be key in making sure I can make the best use of my time!

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