

# Flok Health, a fusion of AI and human physios for world-class care

*As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Finn Stevenson, CEO and co-founder at Flok Health about professional sport, back pain and becoming the UK's first AI-powered physiotherapy clinic.*

Temps de lecture : minute

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The idea for Flok was inspired by my experience as a professional rower. I have a background in medicine and musculoskeletal science, but rowed professionally between 2015 and 2018. As an athlete I had daily access to our team physios, which meant we'd recover rapidly from injury (and often avoid potential injuries altogether).

A little while after I left rowing I went to see my GP with back pain. I came up against a crazy long wait for NHS treatment or staggering private costs, and it was a real wake-up call in terms of what access to care looked like for the vast majority of people outside of an elite sport environment.

I'd experienced first-hand just how big of an impact physiotherapy could have if it was delivered quickly before symptoms worsen. I wanted to find a way to make physiotherapy available to more people more quickly in a way that's cost-effective and scalable for large health systems like the NHS.

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

*Flok* is the UK's first AI-powered physiotherapy clinic. We enable NHS patients to access same-day video call appointments for back pain, using AI physiotherapists to deliver personalised, on-demand appointments at scale, with no waiting list.

Crucially we're not just developing new technology, we've gone through regulatory approval as a healthcare provider to be able to deliver full treatment pathways directly to patients on behalf of our NHS partners. This means we're creating a brand new digital care pathway for MSK patients in the NHS.

Our platform is the first and only digital MSK provider to be approved by the CQC, and we automate the full care pathway for most patients, including initial assessment and triage. Whilst patients are our end users, our customers are NHS commissioners and Trusts.

We've already completed several successful trials with NHS Trusts and we'll be rolling out the platform later this year, so NHS patients will start being able to self-refer to Flok for same-day appointments.

Our aim is to eradicate long waiting lists for MSK physiotherapy in the UK. Currently, MSK physiotherapy accounts for around a third of GP appointments and waiting lists for community physiotherapy services average 12+ weeks. Imagine the impact if the majority of these patients could be managed through Flok, accessing their appointments at a time that suits them, and freeing up capacity in existing services. MSK conditions like back pain are now the number one cause of disability globally - we can change that by giving people fast, on-demand access to

world-class care.

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

My co-founder Ric and I started working on Flok in 2022. We got our regulatory approvals (CQC and MHRA) in 2023, and this is when our first NHS trials began. We'll be launching with several NHS Trusts later this year. Over that time the problem we're trying to solve hasn't changed, but our solution has definitely evolved. Specifically, we've ended up needing to build a far more sophisticated approach to decision automation than we initially envisioned. We realised that existing programming languages aren't great at describing the full complexity and nuance of clinical reasoning - we therefore ended up developing a proprietary new domain-specific programming language that can. This language is what enables our engine to autonomously react appropriately in a broad range of potential clinical scenarios, and do so in a way that's demonstrably safe to deploy at scale without direct human supervision.

## Tell us about the working culture at Flok Health

We're big believers in the value of working together in person - our whole team is based together in our Cambridge office at least 80% of the time. We've found that this hugely enhances collaboration and team culture, and allows us all to stay more easily aligned while moving at pace. To facilitate this we believe in making the office environment a really great place to work. We converted a grain barn on a farm in Cambridge so we're surrounded by fields and natural light, and we also have our own fully equipped team gym to practise what we preach.

## How are you funded?

We raised a £2M seed round in July 2022, led by Eka Ventures and joined by Form Ventures and angels including Paul Roberts (co-founder at CMR Surgical) and Paul Forster (co-founder at Indeed.com). We were also awarded an Innovate UK Smart Grant in December last year to help fund our increasing level of scale.

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

Our biggest challenge has been one we intentionally gave ourselves. We had a strong belief from the outset that the real value of digital MSK provision can only be realised if you are able to go beyond being just a digital therapeutic, and instead offer a full digital clinic service that can safely manage patients from self-referral through to discharge.

Doing this makes developing a service radically more difficult: we needed to build software that could automate safety-critical decision-making (all previous digital MSK solutions for back pain have instead relied on a human clinician to assess a patient before they can access the pathway) and also meant facing significant additional regulatory hurdles (CQC, MHRA).

We've worked closely with the UK regulators to make this possible, and the extra development and clinical effort was definitely worthwhile. Being able to manage all components of our patient's care pathway means we can give them a faster, better experience, and being a registered healthcare provider changes the way we can work with our NHS customers. We're able to form much deeper partnerships as a healthcare provider.

# How does Flok answer an unmet need?

More than 300,000 people are currently on NHS wait lists for MSK physiotherapy and one-quarter of these patients have been waiting more than three months to be seen. As a result, over 30 million working days are lost to MSK conditions every year in the UK and they account for up to 30% of GP consultations in England. These conditions are far too common to put every patient in a room with a clinician, so we need new care models to deliver the right care at population scale.

It's a huge problem and it's only getting harder for patients to access the physiotherapy they need. Our technology is proof that many of these appointments can be automated, freeing up clinician time for cases where it's needed, whilst enabling patients to be seen immediately and more conveniently.

We know from our early trials that patients really like what we offer, and that it works. As the only CQC-approved digital MSK provider in the UK, we're uniquely positioned to answer this unmet need and reshape how physiotherapy is delivered in the NHS.

## What's in store for the future?

We've started with back pain clinics, but our technology and ambitions are much broader - our goal is to build the world's best community healthcare provider. Demands on healthcare systems globally are only increasing - our role is to scale clinicians by automating high volume treatment pathways, and free up capacity in existing services. We're already working on expanding our AI clinics into other common health conditions, and will launch new services later this year.

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

There's a piece of advice given to me early on by one of our investors that I find myself thinking about surprisingly often - "Nothing is ever as good or as bad as it initially seems". It's pretty important to find a way to get energised by both the peaks and the troughs - apart from anything else it just makes the whole thing more enjoyable. Also, make sure you have a co-founder.

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

Building a company can be pretty all-consuming so during the week I try to consistently do the basics - get into the office early to use the gym (usually the ski erg), cook decent food, and read something interesting before bed to sleep better. I think routines are a bit like startups - if you're succeeding more often than you fail you're probably doing ok.

Finn Stevenson is the CEO and cofounder at [\*Flok Health\*](#).

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Article by Finn Stevenson