

Digital Triage...a Faster Path to Treatment



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Massachusetts residents have better access to high quality medical services than any state in the union, but gaps remain in certain areas. One of the people working diligently to find solutions to those gaps is Barbara Kohler, COO of 3Derm, a Boston-based digital health company aimed at optimizing dermatology care.

When Kohler talks about 3Derm's innovative imaging triage system, she explains that dermatology, a highly specialized field, suffers from a personnel shortage. Patients across the United States requiring urgent treatment may wait months for a dermatology appointment. With 3Derm, a dermatologist can remotely review a patient's skin concern within hours, and if needed, see the patient in-person within a week.

"There are only 10,000 dermatologists in the United States, and the number of dermatology residencies stays the same each year. There will be a dermatologist shortage for the foreseeable future," notes Kohler. "Digital health can solve this dermatology access issue."

Q: What does "Digital Health" mean to you?

"To me, digital health means enabling specialty access across a spectrum of patients. At 3Derm, we work with a diversity of health systems: urban, rural, varying levels of Medicaid populations. For patients within some of these health systems, it's a 109-day wait to see a dermatologist. Melanoma, for example, is one of the fastest metastasizing cancers. If a patient with melanoma waits 109 days, her health is at risk. With our system, a dermatologist can triage that patient's skin concern, and put her on a faster path to treatment. Alternatively, if a patient has a benign condition, a dermatologist can screen her out remotely, saving her the time and expense of an in-person dermatology visit."

Q: Why does bringing health care into the digital age matter?

"Here is one of many examples of why digital health matters. We had one case where a patient presented at primary care with what looked like eczema. The primary care staff took images with 3Derm and forwarded them on to dermatology. Within hours the dermatologist spotted T-Cell Lymphoma and was able to see the patient in-person within 6 days. I believe that digital health is the most effective, when we can keep this care network intact."

Q. What was the genesis of you or your company setting up shop in Massachusetts? What kept you here?

"Massachusetts is the healthcare hub. Folks come from all over the world to be treated here. We have top notch health care delivery institutions, successful companies focused on health care, terrific universities, and immense capital. All those things in one place is essential. Prior to 3Derm, I worked at athenahealth, another Massachusetts startup that has grown into an impressive company. When I was first introduced to 3Derm, I realized the significant impact that we could make on patient lives. It's a perfect fit for me. We are absolutely making a difference for patients."

"Digital health can solve this dermatology access issue."

- Barbara Kohler, COO, 3Derm

"I was born and raised here and attended graduate school at Harvard. This city makes it easy to recruit top talent. What's not to love? You've got the Cape, two great cities in Boston and Cambridge, easy access to New

York; the suburbs are beautiful, and housing is a good investment. It is just a great place to live. Plus, there are convenient opportunities to share learning and build relationships. There are quality conferences just a T ride away. Boston is a great place for digital health firms to grow."

Q. What were some of the challenges you faced in getting 3Derm off the ground?

"Like everyone in the telemedicine community, we're trying to navigate healthcare reimbursement. So far, we've been successful working with individual payers to cover 3Derm services, but these individual conversations take time. So simultaneously we've taken a more active role in working with policy makers in order to advance the cause."

Q. What kind of advice would you give to someone just getting started in the digital health cluster in Massachusetts?

"I would definitely suggest interning for one of the startups. Many firms need developers and IT people. Most firms need people who are bright and capable general problem solvers. We had a great experience with the Bain Externship program. I'd highly recommend connecting with MassChallenge or one of the other incubators to find a way in.

Massachusetts is a hotspot. You have phenomenal academic centers, a terrific group of VCs and a number of opportunities with entrepreneurial competitions. If a person is looking to further a career in digital health, this is the place to be."



Achieving the Triple Aim

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