

From Vision to Reality

The journey so far...

VISION
HEALTH
PIONEERS
INCUBATOR



Welcome to our journey so far

Welcome to the story of the Vision Health Pioneers Incubator! The journey is far from over, but so much has been achieved from our startups that we wanted to share with you what happened in 2020 and 2021.

Over 40 entrepreneurs in 13 teams have been supported in our incubator in Berlin since the idea for Vision Health Pioneers Incubator began in 2019. Many more will go through the even bigger program in 2022 and 2023.

Young exciting entrepreneurs have been joining us in Berlin and have received training from inspiring mentors and coaches, used our free coworking space in the center of the city, had access to vital technology and been given equity-free funding of up to 72,000 Euro per team.

Over 150 healthcare experts have partnered with Vision Health Pioneers Incubator to make the incubator happen. To name just a few of those who we are very grateful to - Charite, Pfizer, Flying Health and Berlin Partner. We know we speak on behalf of all our entrepreneurs when we say a huge thank you to all our mentors, coaches and partners. It has been a thrilling time but it is far from over.

That's because the show will continue! We will again invest more than 1.5 million Euros of public funding over the next two years. This support originates from a special European Union response to the Covid-19 pandemic and we will now be able to grant up to 80,000 Euro per team with equity-free funding. To house our cohorts we have partnered with Unicorn Coworking Space in their beautiful original building with modern facilities. Coaching and mentoring from the best of the best in healthcare and beyond will once again help power the startups as they travel on an extended 10-month program. It will be an electrifying ride, so come and join in!

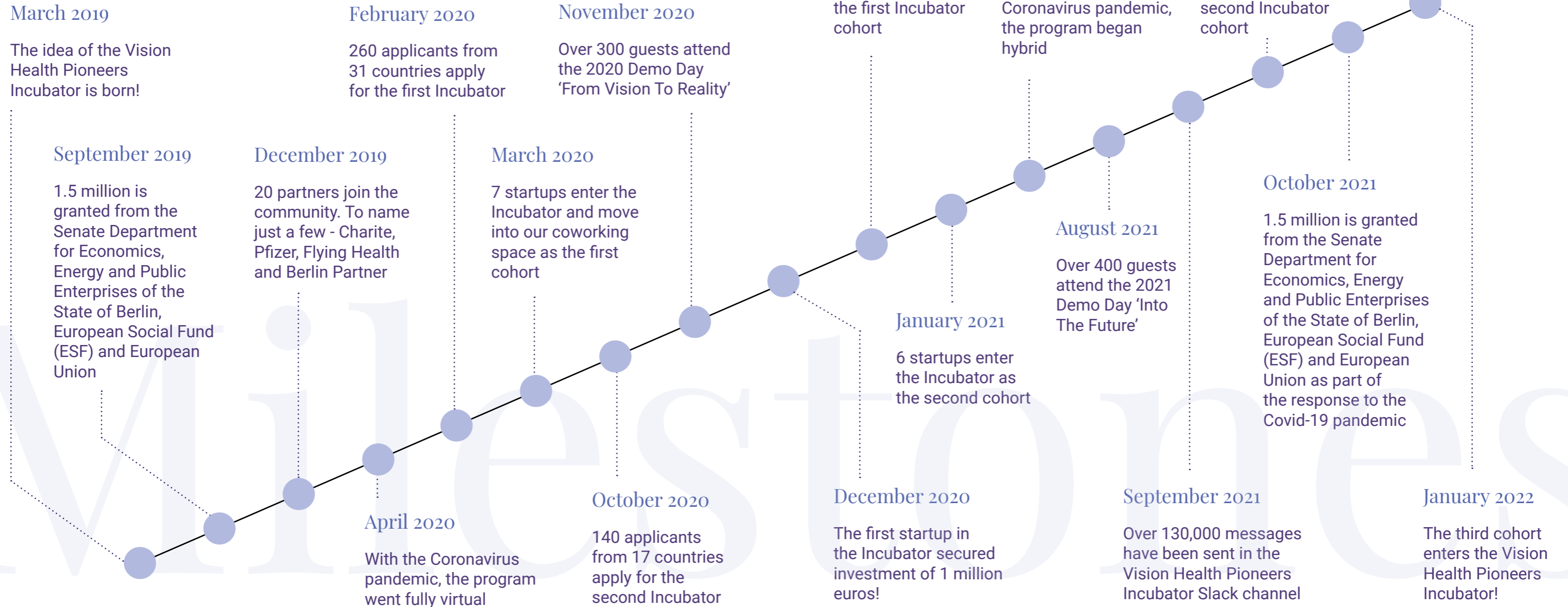
Within these pages you will discover the story of all the startups who have been through the Vision Health Pioneers Incubator - from what drives them to what they are doing to improve the healthcare system. Plus, hear from a handful of the many supporters in the ecosystem and be inspired by their words of wisdom.

Berlin has long been the capital of entrepreneurs and we strive to continue to connect healthcare innovators from all over Europe. Vision Health Pioneers Incubator is funded by the Senate Department for Economics, Energy and Public Enterprises of the State of Berlin, European Social Fund (ESF) and European Union. Without their support, this simply wouldn't be possible.

Shape the future of digital health with us

Maren Lesche & Joscha Hofferbert
Initiators, Vision Health Pioneers Incubator

The journey so far...



Meet the governmental backbone of the Berlin Startup Scholarship Program

They relentlessly support young entrepreneurs and make Berlin a powerhouse for startups - the Senate Department for Economics, Energy and Public Enterprises of the State of Berlin.

We were delighted to speak with the leading forces behind the Berlin Startup Scholarship, Norbert Herrmann and Mirko Jäkel. Together with their colleagues they have created a framework which fuels Berlin's growth in global settings. Berlin is renowned as a destination for innovation, but it's their tireless efforts that's behind why the German capital is the hotspot for entrepreneurialism. We explored more about how their efforts are modernizing the economy ecologically and securing and creating jobs.

They are in many ways pushing the good ship of innovation forward with their activities - Making Berlin an attractive commercial and industrial location, utilising the reservoir of qualified and motivated specialists in and around the city and finding results in impressive creative diversity along with a high quality of life.

Norbert Herrmann, is very well known in the startup world. For some time he has tirelessly been one of the most active spokespersons for startups at a federal government level. He man-

ages and supports large and small projects by creating enabling environments. He is joined by Mirko Jäkel who is equally integral for making things tick. They hold different roles within all the activity around the Berlin Startup Scholarship and are also quite different characters. Mirko operates in a specialised department and is responsible for framing the conditions for programs like the Vision Health Pioneers Incubator and essentially fueling them now and into the future. Norbert on the other hand has an overall view of the startups ecosystem and describes his role as "having a telephone and a LinkedIn account. Through that I try to understand and listen and then translate startup activity into the thinking of the Berlin administration." This also works the other way, so startups understand more about how things operate inside the Berlin Senate. They are modest in their roles but are both heroes behind the Berlin startup scene.

Despite the differences in activity, Norbert and Mirko are united on one clear goal - to support startups in order to support Berlin. They are good spirited and both curious to always discover what's working and isn't working and how they can make things even better.

The Senate Department for Economics, Energy and Public Enterprises

The Senate Department for Economics, Energy and Public Enterprises does not specialise in any single topic when it comes to startups. They focus on any solution that can help the city prosper and grow. Sectors of interest include healthcare but also energy transition, mobility, female entrepreneurs, green tech - any area that can help to build Berlin. Mirko describes more about this. "There are many excellent ideas in different fields being produced in the city. We have been really glad to receive extra funds from EU React so we could focus on the impact of Covid19 and on supporting solutions." Vision Health Pioneers Incubator for example will continue for another two years after more than 3 million Euro of public funding has been invested. With the most recent support originating from a special European Union's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Mirko continues, "What makes the Berlin Startup Scholarship so different to others out there is that it's early-stage focused. The funding is provided at the idea stage, or as a pro-

TOTYPE is being constructed. Other programs focused on latter stages of development. This is obviously great for the overall ecosystem, but we ensure startups don't miss out on key information, such as how to go to market or enter the market as a first time founder." The duo share how there are other pre-seed programs available but there are actually not that many in Berlin.

On asking why Berlin has such a renowned history with startups, Norbert explains that there is no single answer but that the secret ingredient may be that Berlin is simply a cool place for young people. "Berlin has attracted lots of people, from all over the world, with crazy ideas and they have turned them into a reality. The famous startups successes are the likes of Zalando or Rocket Internet, who now operate in an alumni of businesses that were created and succeeded here. To be successful in the startup ecosystem takes time and Berlin was early enough to do this." Norbert also emphasizes how there are other locations in Germany that have thriving startups ecosystems - however Berlin already has a wealth of contacts and that can make a difference.

Norbert and Mirko agree that a healthcare program needs to be in Berlin due to how powerful the industry is in the capital. But what's interesting to observe now is that in other sectors, the experts and investors are coming into Berlin to meet the startups. Norbert shares more on this. "The startups are here. So family offices for example are coming to Berlin to make connections to them. Even with finance - which you would think of as being housed in Frankfurt - most of the finance startups are here in Berlin."

Both are clearly proud to be working in this area. They share warm smiles when discussing how the startups are being supported and how they help turn visions into realities. However it isn't all completely perfect just yet as Norbert explains. "On the other hand I'm frustrated because a lot of good ideas are not being realised. They may not like the bureaucratic way that things need to be done or how the money available must be used in a certain way."

Despite these feelings, Mirko shares how they have been succeeding with the majority

of startups. "We started in 2016 and the plan was to support 1,300 talents with a scholarship till the end of the funding period in 2023. With the last round now starting we'll surely reach 1,800." This is an incredible achievement and despite the praise, both Mirko and Norbert are quick to say the praise is for the incubators and the startups.

Experts in and around the Incubator

With the recent news that Vision Health Pioneers Incubator has been awarded another two years, Norbert says that the wealth of mentors and coaches the Incubator works with, makes a difference. "Knowing that healthcare professionals are involved in the Incubator means you really know what the problems are. We see that in nearly every successful incubator - they have a network of people who work or operate in that particular field. I hope in the future, various programs can share their knowledge or people in a way where if one is missing a crucial coach, another can support and provide this." This evolution is an exciting vision for Norbert and their activity with the Berlin Startup Scholarship.

Berlin has many startups that are now fully fledged businesses and therefore Norbert questions whether the word 'startups' is even as relevant as it once was before. "Maybe the word will disappear. HelloFresh - which now is to be part of DAX40, the German index of leading shares - isn't really a startup anymore, but is famed as being one. We may be saying 'early stage companies' and 'grown up companies' because it is different now to how it was before. But no matter the words used, we will always need innovative fresh ideas time and time again. To help Berlin continue to attract people. We as a department and administration will support that. We are drivers but we are not managing it. The programs are doing the best job and we must ensure we listen to them. For the small things and for the big things. We keep the ball rolling."

Mirko adds a lasting point. "We hope in the future to have more and more solutions that solve problems we don't even know exist yet. Startups grow into comp hire more employees and

my from Berlin." It's an exciting future and with Mirko and Norbert leading the way, Berlin is set to continue to move forward into a thrilling future.



Norbert Herrmann

**Startup Affairs
Economic Policy Unit, Berlin Senate
Department for Economics, Energy and
Public Enterprises**



Mirko Jäkel

**Policy issues Startup Scholarship
Regular Structural Policy, Business
Development; Berlin Senate Department for
Economics, Energy and Public Enterprises**

Our second cohort of Startups!

At the beginning of 2021, six startups joined the second cohort at Vision Health Pioneers Incubator. Over the course of nine months they received training and coaching on essential startup and medical topics. This knowledge has helped them learn how to validate their inspiring ideas and build strong products and commercialize them. This activity included intense bootcamps, workshops, masterclasses and mentoring. By the end of the journey, they were presenting on stage in front of over 400 guests at 'Into The Future,' our 2021 Demo Day!

During their time in the incubator, each entrepreneur was supported with basic living costs of €2,000 per month - up to €72,000 per team. They were given access to healthcare influencers in the Vision Health Pioneers Incubator community. From healthcare specialists to medical professionals to experienced entrepreneurs - a network of supporters was and continues to be eager to help them.

Access to testing fields - hospitals, patients, decision-makers and health insurance companies helped the startups test their product, and in turn, they received valuable feedback. Healthcare goes beyond frontiers and our international ecosystem supported global reach and business opportunities with them.

On top of the funding, the entrepreneurs had access to our coworking space located in the heart of Berlin, in close vicinity to the most important healthcare organizations such as Charité and the Federal Ministry of Health.

It wasn't all work and no play! The startups were provided with various community events which ranged from kayaking in Spreewald to get-togethers BBQs in the garden, to wine tasting classes, gin mixing and more! It's important to take a break sometimes and enjoy all that Berlin and the surrounding area has to offer.

Discover more about the startups over the next few pages...



Making home UV-Therapy as normal as brushing your teeth



“We are creating quality of life for those with chronic skin diseases.”

Jan Elsner
Co-Founder

If you saw a problem every time you received treatment, would you decide to make it your purpose to solve it? Not many people would. But Jan Elsner isn't many people.

When you find out more about Skinuvita and how they are making UV-therapy more accessible, you soon discover what lies at the heart of the startup. There is a vision, yes, but also an inspiration weaved into the business and those who work within it. It's the real feeling of knowing what it's like to live with a chronic skin disease and that the effective medical treatments available are actually not so easily applied.

Jan Elsner, who who co-founded Skinuvita, has the chronic skin disease Psoriasis and had for a long-time seen numerous therapists and tried different treatments until he eventually found that UV therapy was the best for him. However, he encountered a problem. He was recommended 30 individual sessions, the average for a successful treatment cycle, but to receive these, he needed to visit the dermatologist every single time. Time is the most precious thing and this treatment process takes it away. Plus the travel involved in going to and from the doctors. That's why home UV-Therapy is so important.

Therefore UV therapy, in its current setup, is just not applicable for most patients of chronic skin diseases. But the solution from Skinuvita is. Jan decided to improve the situation for himself and all others in similar positions. To create a digitalized therapy which allows patients to use a safe and medically supervised UV therapy at home.

Jan explains how things began to really take off. “We had input from dermatologists in Bremen, public health experts and insurance companies. They were all keen to support. Then in 2019 with the Digital Health Act, the market changed and digital health became far more relevant.”

Even the global pandemic didn't seem to hugely impact the startup being formed. “It

was during this process that we were invited to pitch at the Professional Association of the German Dermatologists (BVDD) in Berlin and then by surprise became the wildcard entry for the Vision Health Pioneers Incubator.”

Jan shares how joining the Vision Health Pioneers Incubator has helped their dream of making home UV-Therapy possible. “We went from an evening and weekend project to, on short notice, having the luxury to build a team.” It was this process where fate played a role.

THE SKINUVITA TEAM

Jan reached out to Till Fitzke, who became a Co-Founder. They were joined by Bojana Petkovic, UI Designer, who focuses on marketing design and visual identity. “I had a promising future in my job at the time but it wasn't so interesting. I relate more to this – where we can create things from scratch. Rather than being a tiny screw in a larger organization.” Vincent Pursion completes the team as Finance Manager and is making sure they are ready for investment.

As the Skinuvita team speaks, it is clear they have a well-balanced approach to startup life and embrace the journey they are on.

THE SKINUVITA HOME UV-THERAPY PRODUCT

The future looks very promising for Skinuvita. For example a recent meeting with an influential Head of a Dermatology Department took place and this might lead to advanced clinical tests. They aim to have a virtual treatment therapy device tested under medical supervision and overcome some of the typical barriers of certification. Following this, the next step is to take their product to the business sector.

Till explains more about their product. “We're in different beta phases. On one side is a therapy manager for nurses and doctors to plan and set sessions for treatment. On the other, a patient app where they receive session information – things like when and how long a treatment is. We were also recently able to integrate a bluetooth control unit which allows our software to connect with existing therapy devices, enabling an automatic dosage transfer. Therefore there is no longer the risk that patients could be harmed by setting a wrong dosage. Now we have to design it, connect it, make it look nice and certify it.”

Jan describes how the Vision Health Pioneers Incubator has helped their mission of home UV-therapy. “It's hard to imagine how we would have created our startup without the support. It's like gaining knowledge from ten years of industry experience within just nine months. There's just so many new things to consider when you're not an expert. This is exactly the right program for young people and young ideas.”

They have big dreams for home UV-Therapy at Skinuvita. They don't just want to be considered an app which is turned on and off. Their international team has contacts in the Netherlands, Scandinavia and of course across Germany. Jan explains, “We are creating quality of life for those with chronic skin diseases. The more rural the area, the more relevant a home treatment. We now have a well established treatment and will use technology to make it safe, accessible and to guide people. To give them a normal life. We want UV-therapy to be as normal as brushing your teeth.”

Making the invisible damage of COPD visible



"A lot of people put the emphasis on the heart but our lungs are equally important. After all, without oxygen, the blood the heart pumps is useless. Cardiovascular diseases get the fame for all the right reasons, but now we want to raise awareness and contribute to making lung health considered just as important."

These are the words of James Hugall, Co-Founder and CEO of Breaz. In the following interview, the Breaz team speak openly about making the invisible damage of COPD visible. The lung diseases they are trying to tackle, what drives them to make a difference and what the future has in store for their device. They also share why now might be the best time to make something come to full fruition.

"The impact of COVID19 may impact the awareness of respiratory diseases like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Before this time, many people would feel a pain in their chest and just think they are getting old or not being as active as they could be. We want to

change this mindset and bring our product into the market to help analyze people effectively."

James, who is from the UK, originally began making his plan for the business in Barcelona, Spain. He worked there as a scientist in academia before moving to Berlin, Germany, to enroll with the Vision Health Pioneers Incubator. James is joined by Co-Founder Austrian Petra Stockinger and Eduardo Evaristo, Mechanical Engineer from Venezuela. Combined, this international team is focused on improving people's lives and making the invisible damage of COPD, visible.

THE BREAZ PROTOTYPE

The Breaz team have a vision for their product to be considered as everyday as a thermometer or a blood pressure monitor.

The Breaz prototype is a simple to use device which measures and grades respiratory diseases like COPD. All patients need to do is

breathe normally and within a couple of minutes the doctor receives the results. They can then choose the best next steps, whether further tests, or beginning or adjusting treatment.

"We want to make it simple to use and reach as many different settings as possible. In primary care. Whenever the individual wants to check their lung health, they can." James says.

MAKING THE INVISIBLE DAMAGE OF COPD VISIBLE

Both James and Petra are scientists and have previously worked in an academic setting. "We wanted to get out of the scientific world and into something more applied, that's where our interest in healthcare innovation took hold. That desire for something more took us to the d.HEALTH course in Barcelona. This is where you try to create a business idea based on a real experience in a clinical setting. I was in the respiratory team and saw first-hand the shock-

ing amount of people suffering from COPD."

"More than half of the people there were dying from this disease. We only saw them at the very end and it was horrible to watch. To see the suffering." It was during these traumatic experiences that James saw the need for something to improve this situation.

"The current method just isn't working effectively. From both the patient and the doctor's point of view. When diagnosing patients, the main method is the force spirometry test, which is where the patient breathes in a whole lot of air and exhausts it as quickly as possible. It's quite a stressful test for patients and there are often long waiting periods."

Doctors in primary care have complained that the test isn't always completed effectively - 75% of cases are undiagnosed.

"So we want to test people effectively, reduce the number of undiagnosed cases, take control early with detection and follow the patient throughout the rest of their life. COPD is in many ways the new stroke."

After this, a colleague in an EIT Health Med-Tech Bootcamp recommended the Vision Health Pioneers Incubator.

THE BREAZ TEAM

The team today splits most of the business activities between James and Petra. Eduardo, as Mechanical Engineer, focuses on the prototype of their product. He describes his role, "We're a hard-tech company so we need to develop and produce a physical device. There's no script to follow. At times I have to kind of trust my gut and then see if it works. If it does, I feel amazing. If it doesn't, then I need to see what I can do about it."

James shares more about their time with Vision Health Pioneers Incubator. "It's been a good introduction to topics that would have taken us forever to try and learn. We've connected with some great people, received mentoring but have also seen how different startups work and operate. We've always really appreciated the support in preparing for what comes afterwards."

"We're getting to where we want to go - to have a functional demonstration of our device so we can take it to a hospital and test it- We can then use those learnings to develop further."

"We have come from science where you try to prove if something is wrong by obeying the rules of the world as you would expect it to. At the beginning of our journey, we wanted to know what's the right answer, now we know there isn't always one, you just take different paths." Petra explains.

Breaz was born from frustration in academia, a willingness to learn of problems in clinical settings, the leap into a new country, hard work in an incubator and ultimately, along the entire journey, a desire to help people.

"The impact of COVID19 may impact the awareness of respiratory diseases like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)."

James Hugall
Co-Founder and CEO





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„Given an exponential and accelerating mindset, we have the opportunity not to take incremental steps but exponential ones”

DR. DANIEL KRAFT MD

Faculty Chair for Medicine, Singularity University

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MINIME

The startup founded by psychotherapists — for psychotherapists



Look no further than minime for a startup that's helping patients and therapists build a more interactive relationship. Founded by Paul Schneeweiß, a practicing cognitive behavioral therapist, minime was built with psychologists' needs in mind. The CEO came up with the name for his startup on the train to the hospital where he still works today. "The idea just came to me. I spoke it out loud and thought, why not, it fits."

The platform's name serves as a metaphor for reflecting one's inner thoughts and feelings—for example, through the components that make up the SORC (Situation, Organism, Reaction, Consequence) Model and other self-monitoring strategies in psychology.

A CUTTING EDGE APPROACH: DIGITIZING PAPER LOGS

Through Schneeweiß's work in the psychotherapy field, it became clear that there's a lot of homework involved for both patients and practitioners - generally using paper logs, which have become outdated. "It became obvious we needed to digitize things and to make complex concepts more tangible."

According to Stella Römhildt, User Experience Director at minime, the worksheets patients complete between sessions are complex, and the paper logs aren't particularly nice to look at. "This is the reality. Not just in one setting, but in psychotherapy settings all over Germany."

So Schneeweiß created a card game—the basis of the startup's MVP—and integrated it in therapy sessions before developing a digital version. Ask the founder to describe his product, and he'll cite the many different layers involved.

"We have paper logs and we have specific self-monitoring strategies." In line with the SORC Model, these strategies consist of four layers. These include the client's: Thoughts, Feelings, Body Sensations and Observable Behavior.

By offering a playful take on these four layers - including their triggers and consequences - Schneeweiß and his team have created a

digital framework for overcoming challenging behaviors. The platform is essentially a toolbox therapists can use to distribute exercises to patients: creating them, sharing them, and ultimately, analyzing them.

MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT CHALLENGES AND COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unique opportunities for minime—and a unique set of challenges. "Therapy changed a lot because therapists were so non-digital, and suddenly they had to be digital," said Römhildt.

While some therapists continued to work with patients in person—wearing masks to ensure safety—there was an overwhelming disconnect, given the lack of visibility into both parties' facial expressions. And then, with telehealth appointments, therapists could no longer distribute paper logs. (Unsurprisingly, scanning, printing, and emailing the documents wasn't an efficient alternative.) While the startup is still in its early stages, minime is offering a solution that transcends digital and in-person therapeutic models. It comes at an appropriate time—as mental health issues have become more prevalent during the ongoing public health crisis.

"I think with COVID-19 and all these regulations, we were forced to behave unhealthily," confessed Schneeweiß. "And by unhealthily, I mean reducing your regular contacts, and relying on activating behavior patterns."

The challenges resulting from the pandemic have only compounded the stress so many of us face—yet we've also become more aware. According to Schneeweiß, patients have begun scheduling sessions with the goal of no longer coping in unproductive ways.

Per the SORC Model, and with minime, they can do just that. The mental health startup has launched at an ideal time, as more and more people begin to advocate for greater transparency.

"The awareness of mental health, and being able to talk more openly about it these past

few years, has been a great development," said Nina Hackenbroich, Full-Stack Developer at minime. "This will always be an issue people face, and society and humanity will improve with this increased visibility."

A STRONG TEAM WITH A JOINT MISSION

The founding team at minime added a fourth employee to their roster - the UX/UI & Marketing Expert Rafael R. Da Silva - but their goals remain the same.

Schneeweiß's objective is simple: "Having therapists who not only like this idea, but who use it and deeply integrate it into their therapy," he said. "And by 'deeply,' I mean, 'I don't know how we ever did it using paper logs.'"

Hackenbroich added, "Hopefully we will be in as many therapy practices and hospitals as possible in Germany, and really supporting the patient-therapist relationship." As a developer, she's confident that digital tools like minime will be popular in other countries. In the next year or so, Römhildt projects a huge number of therapists overcoming their fear of adopting digital tools. "I want minime to really encourage patients to communicate their thoughts and feelings."

The mental health startup's MVP will be ready at the end of August 2021—at which point the team plans to have their first therapist and clients onboarded.

Team minime's secret weapon for all the progress they've made? Römhildt believes

they've conquered this early stage in large part due to effective communication. "I like to compare it to a romantic relationship," she said. "Honesty is the most important thing for us. We were honest from the start about our beliefs and struggles. That way we know about everyone's history and can cut some slack if needed."

She shared that the founding members regularly check in with one another—asking how things are going—to ensure everyone can speak freely. There are no complex power dynamics, and there's a sense of openness and integrity that's integral to the team's well-being and overall success.

So, what does the path forward look like? Only time will tell—but minime is slated to be a huge hit among therapists looking to securely digitize their paper logs.

"What I've learned is that we are used to doing things again and again—to learning patterns," said Schneeweiß. "If you are doing new things, it comes with a lot of uncertainty that could lead to frustration or a search for short-term

solutions. Even building up a company, being aware that uncertainty is okay is key."

As a therapist and a founder, it's no wonder that minime's CEO has mastered the uncertainty many of us fear. The mental health startup acknowledges that we have to reflect on our anxieties and frustrations, and then accept and release them in order to move forward.

"It became obvious we needed to digitize things. To make complex concepts tangible."

Paul Schneeweiß
Co-Founder

Where education and technology intersect



Born in 2018, ALMA fuses design, anthropology and technology in their bid to create a cultural revolution in the area of female intimate care. ALMA is a collaborative practice that connects professionals from all around Europe. Their team comprises Giulia and Isabel, who utilize design and anthropological methods in creating solutions, Tommaso and Ryo who are scientists materializing ideas into products, Tauras a graphic designer who leads the brand strategy. Plus they are joined by Heni Hicks - PM, UX and FullStack.

In Berlin, they are represented by founder Giulia Tomasello and Tauras Staltonis, who have been busy developing a wearable biosensor that monitors the pH in vaginal fluids, setting up a global community platform and completing a book about female intimate care innovation.

ALMA UNIVERSE: CREATING CULTURAL CHANGE IN FEMALE INTIMATE CARE THROUGH EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Lovingly known as “ALMA Universe,” ALMA’s work sits at the praxis of science, technology and culture. It draws inspiration from the very community it seeks to empower, and to date, they have run numerous workshops exploring the hearts and minds of more than 400 participants across the world.

Their website (al-ma.org) showcases the extensive work they have done surrounding female intimate health, with aesthetics that echo a Sofia Coppola film. For ALMA, design and aesthetics are political.

“The depiction of female intimate care in society is typically very medical. We want to show the normality that comes with it and with that, of course, the beauty that goes together with it – because it should attract and be something that inspires people to want to engage and know more.”

In designing a wearable sensor, it is not simply designing something beautiful and feminine. Rather, there is a need to ensure a level of comfort for their users. Not just in wearability, but in how it presents itself to the person. They question everything, including the traditional notions of femininity, its aesthetics and the role it plays in the stigma and politics that surround the issue of female intimate care.

“The stigma and silencing behind female intimate care come from a problem within the system, within culture. Our solution in addressing this is to bring awareness through technology and education. To gain profit from spreading awareness sounds like a joke to us. In an industry that is primarily still profit-driven, we are like white flies.”

Throughout their time at the incubator, ALMA has struggled to articulate their complex vision within the strictly enforced four-five minute timed pitch sessions. This is in part due to their unconventional approach to innovation. Essentially their mission is not just the development of a wearable sensor, the

technology or the innovation. Rather, ALMA is already looking three steps ahead towards the cultural change their work will bring.

WHITE FLIES OF THE FEMTECH WORLD

In Italy, the white fly is the one that stands out as different from all the others. That’s ALMA, who are developing an entirely not-for-profit, non-medical community platform based on user experience. Inspired by their workshop series ‘ALMA meets Flora,’ they are aiming to build an inclusive, crowd-sourced community platform around female intimate health.

ALMA sees the value and wisdom of the female body and the sum of their experiences. Building this platform is the first step towards fostering a movement of awareness– a movement that seeks to see individuals empowered and in control of their health through a holistic approach. This platform also allows for open conversation to take place in a safe space. Dialogue is of great importance, considering

the culture of silence that blankets this field. Giving a voice to their target demographic contributes to the normalization of female health issues and breaking stigmas and taboos. It also allows for the advocacy of female intimate health that is still regrettably greatly underrepresented in modern medicine.

“There are many areas that still fall short in modern medicine when it comes to female bodies. It is such a shame that we are flying to Mars, but there is so much still unknown about what’s happening in the female body.”

LANGUAGE, COMMUNITY AND CO-CREATING KNOWLEDGE

Throughout their time at the incubator, ALMA have been able to better align with their core values. They are seeking impact investors, perhaps even partnerships where there can be a co-creation of knowledge. Their book, which acts as an introduction to their platform, will be completed in September.

ALMA’s methodology is based on user dia-

“There are many areas that still fall short in modern medicine when it comes to female bodies. It is such a shame that we are flying to Mars, but there is so much still unknown about what’s happening in the female body.”

Giulia Tomasello
Co-Founder

ries that describe their current experiences searching for information regarding intimate health. This has consisted of a survey where users’ preferences in terms of features were explored and participatory workshops in different cultural contexts. Data of which has been used to design the platform.

When asked what gets them up in the morning, Giulia speaks about her constant inspiration to bring about this change. For Tauras, it is the realization that the clock is ticking and there is still much to be done.



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„What’s more exciting than improving healthcare, essentially improving people’s lives”

OLIVER EIDEL

Mentor, Vision Health Pioneers Incubator

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KARIS

The mental health startup destigmatizing adult ADHD



“If I travel around the world and see just one person using Karis, and they say it’s had a positive impact on their life, that would be amazing.”

Ruben Nieto Lopez
Co-Founder

While completing his Master’s Degree in Barcelona in Winter 2019, David Garrido came up with an idea to improve mental health treatment. A gamified solution blending the arts, science, and emerging technologies to treat adult ADHD. Karis was born. Like many young entrepreneurs Garrido and his Co-Founder Ruben Nieto Lopez - a friend from University - had no masterplan. “I didn’t have any idea how to do it,” Garrido, now Karis’s CEO, confessed. “But I knew there could be massive potential there.”

The two honed in on adult ADHD, an under-diagnosed condition that’s often overlooked in the mental health space. David had experienced mental health challenges of his own; he was well aware of the stigma that still plagues this community, and he and his team have - in just a short time - set out to democratize the support of mental health treatment.

“When we started this project, it was just an idea with a lot of uncertainties,” David Garrido explained. “But we developed a platform that features a series of mini-games: games using art as a stimulus, encouraging adults with ADHD to improve their memory and build other relevant skills.”

“It’s a holistic treatment,” explains Rubén Nieto López, co-founder and CTO of Karis. “The emotional component is important - so the content is more important than the technology.”

The technology is paramount to the user experience. Over the next decade, virtual reality is slated to become one of the most prevalent technologies in existence. Karis hopes to lead the charge as a mental health startup, and while they currently use a browser-based version of emerging VR technology (known as WebXR), they’re keeping a close eye on the future of tech.

Rahul Thangaraj, Karis’s VR Programmer and Developer, considers the platform a “one-stop solution for all your ADHD problems.” He’s diving deep into the game mechanics behind the platform, utilizing his Master’s in Virtual Reality to make the best use of gaming as a viable treatment solution.

The team’s top priority is the user - guiding them through a gamification room and allowing adults with ADHD to perform certain exercises and trigger specific activities. “We are using artistic stimuli,” said Ruben. “Art can be dancing or painting or music - used as a stimulus to improve the engagement in the mini-games we want to incorporate in our platform. It’s all designed to help adults with ADHD manage their symptoms more effectively.”

ADULT ADHD: AN OVERLOOKED MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION

Why did Team Karis decide to focus on people with adult ADHD? Firstly they hope to shed light on the fact that people with ADHD are very sensitive and, secondly, both adults and children may grapple with the condition.

Another differentiator is that Karis features a strong emotional component that isn’t always present in other therapies. As one of the most under-diagnosed conditions in the world, this aspect of the startup is critical.

“That’s why I’m so passionate about it,” added Karis’s COO Alissa Del Toro. “Culturally, for me, it’s a faux-pas to even go to therapy, or talk about mental health, because I’m supposed to be seen as a strong, independent woman who’s blazing a trail.”

While the stigma is unfortunate, the founding team is confident that platforms like Karis - and the fact that Germany is so steeped in health tech - will eventually shift the mindset involving mental health.

WHAT WILL MAKE KARIS A SUCCESS IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS?

“I feel that we are pioneers in this space,” said Alissa. “If we can at least get people talking about adult ADHD in the way that we do - if we can get to the point where someone can say, ‘hey, there are options for managing your ADHD, through this game and through other

treatments’ - then we’ll have been successful.”

There are challenges to overcome in the meantime: among them user adoption, since Karis was built on a groundbreaking concept, and it will take time before people truly understand it.

While emerging tech has become more popular in recent years, Team Karis will need to ensure their platform is in front of as many people as possible. The overall trajectory isn’t unlike what Uber and Lyft went through 10 years ago. People were initially quite skeptical of ride-share platforms, and it took time for the public to get used to these digitized solutions.

THE POWER OF THE TEAM

It’s a busy time as the world begins to reopen. That said, Team Karis is working hard to get their MVP as soon as possible and access the funding they need to continue making progress. The platform will be accessible to the public in late 2021. Testing began in the summer of 2021 and from there, they have a clear-cut strategy.

“The biggest power of Karis lies in how different each team member is,” said Garrido. “We all have many different ways of thinking, and varying mindsets, which is something that plays out in our discussions.” With founding members from Spain, India, and the United States, they’re a diverse yet close-knit group.

This gives Team Karis a broader view of what they are trying to do. Throughout, they intend to put adults with ADHD at the forefront of their vision.

Wavy Health's dulcet Innovations are the future of cardiology care

Music has a powerful effect, but researchers have only just begun to scratch the surface in exploring the extent to which listening to our favorite songs can alter our state of mind and health for the better. This is an area of research with a wealth of possibilities for the healthcare world, and a space that the incubator startup Wavy Health has tapped into to generate a great, multifaceted concept.

Specializing in cardiology, they are creating an application that uses wearable technology, songs and deep tech to treat INOCA, a heart condition that disproportionately affects women, and which can be challenging to diagnose and monitor.

Their app is especially powerful in helping its users identify the sources of their own stress in daily life, which is vital to managing and offsetting INOCA's symptoms. An accessible app that helps track vital data using cutting edge technology.

Wavy Health's Lian Kuiper explains the condition as tied to angina pectoris, that is, chest pain - one of the world's most common heart disorders, with one out of two angina pectoris sufferers also having INOCA.

The perplexing heart condition is short for Ischaemia and No Obstructive Coronary Disease - and manifests when blood supply to the heart is restricted even when there aren't any blockages in the coronary arteries.

Diagnosis and treatment are difficult and often misunderstood. Its symptoms do not often show up on usual tests like ECGs and routine angiograms.

Sufferers can find themselves experiencing what feels like a heart attack only to be told that there is nothing wrong with their heart, and sent home from emergency rooms none the wiser about how to manage their symptoms.

A CONDITION THAT DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTS WOMEN

When their condition is correctly diagnosed, patients can be given medication, and are told to make lifestyle changes - particularly those that reduce stress. One of the many challenges here is a gendered one: two-thirds of sufferers are women, and yet, the majority of research centers around the experiences and treatment needs of men.

This means that when it comes to important matters, such as how much medication a female INOCA patient ought to take, cardiologists are often in the dark.

Wavy Health began in 2018 after its co-founders, Steve Thijssen and Daryl Autar, set out to create solutions to heart problems - a pursuit that won his team the top prize in 2018, at Biome, a hackathon held by Novartis in San Francisco.

While Steve's background is in IT and business, he took very enthusiastically to the world of healthcare, and especially enjoys the stimulating "craziness" of the hackathon experience. The incubator life is equally electrifying, and his enthusiasm is shared by Lian, the team's "research queen."

Steve explains more about why they appreciate the incubator. "We are especially pleased to have joined an incubator program based in Germany, a country that is especially on the ball when it comes to supporting startups operating in this space, in terms of both funding and the degree to which digital health solutions are increasingly afforded legitimacy." This said, the amount of documentation involved is proving a lot of work, and is keeping Lian especially busy.

THE HEALING SOUNDS OF MUSIC

While the initial plan had been to focus on heart failure, Steve and his Co-Founder adapted their approach and mission to first addressing INOCA.

This new direction was prompted by several conversations with cardiologists, including noted physician Prof. Dr. Angela Maas, who emphasized the role stress management plays when it comes to offsetting INOCA's symptoms.

Wavy Health will use wearable technology to analyze heart rhythms and share that data

with healthcare professionals. Dr. Angela Maas focuses on female cardiology patients, and is attached to the Netherlands' Radboud University, an institute that now works closely with the Wavy Health team to help provide the data going into a digital health app that acts as personalized medicine for stress reduction.

With a recent new addition to the Berlin team - Simona Sendroiu, a UX Designer, and Greek medical illustrator Mano Kapazoglou - Wavy Health now boasts four members in Germany, working together to push the boundaries of what is possible when it comes to treating heart conditions like INOCA, while empowering sufferers to take control of their health.

While INOCA is the focus now, there's plenty of scope to use their technology to address a range of cardiovascular complaints, including generalized chest pain and hypertension.

"We wanted to focus on one group now, because it's more specific," Steve explains.

For now, we're pleased to see the team employ this focus and hit the ground running, bringing a much-appreciated drive, exuberance and the spirit of collaboration to the incubator.

"A startup is like a roller coaster. Sometimes it goes well, sometimes it's crazy," says Steve. Lian agrees. "Yes, it's definitely a challenge, but we make the best of it."



"We are especially pleased to have joined an incubator program based in Germany, a country that is on the ball when it comes to supporting startups operating in this space, in terms of both funding and the degree to which digital health solutions are increasingly afforded legitimacy."

Steve Thijssen
Co-Founder

Our inaugural cohort of Startups!

In 2020 the first startups entered the doors to the Vision Health Pioneers Incubator. They came from all over Europe with great ideas for improving healthcare but needed support in launching their business ideas on the German market. With our structured program they were guided through the key phases of product development and how to market launch. Our exclusive partner network provided them with access to coaching and mentoring with experts in healthcare, business, tech and innovation.

During the first three months, the startups validated and fine-tuned their concept which involved everything from onboarding to understanding the medical regulatory requirements for building a healthcare solution.

The entrepreneurs then worked hard on developing their product version and planning their launch. They sourced partners, conducted pilot testing and challenged their own business models to define go-to-market strategies.

Naturally in the last few months, the focus was on thinking and talking business, boosting connection with relevant stakeholders, and engaging Business Angels, VCs, strategic partners, and more. In the final month, the startups presented and pitched their businesses at our special online Demo Day and met with investors.

Discover more about the first ever startups in the Vision Health Pioneers Incubator over the next few pages...



nilo.health is needed more than ever



The time in the Vision Health Pioneers Incubator was exciting, to say the least, for Jonas Keil and Ines R ath (the Founders of nilo.health). During a time when most of the world has stalled, nilo.health is needed more than ever. Due to Covid-19 and all the ways in which it affects daily lives - the stress, anxiety and the normality of working from home - have shown that there should be a much stronger responsibility for employers to offer help and services to their employees surrounding their mental health. This has created an opportunity for nilo.health, one in which their product and services are needed more than ever. It's an opportunity they've grasped.

According to the World Health Organisation, nearly half of the world's population will be affected by mental illness at some point in their lives. The personal and social impact of mental health is well recognized; it can also have a profound economic effect. The German health insurance provider DAK has estimated that between 1997 and 2007, the number of days taken 'sick' by employees, on account of

mental health issues, increased three-fold. When taking account of the current impact of Covid-19, these numbers will be even more profound. From the point of view of the health start-up sector, this provides a major market opportunity.

WHO ARE THEY?

Jonas Keil and Ines R ath quit their jobs in business consultancy to start the adventure of nilo.health in 2019. Based on their early career experience, they spotted a consistent flaw in how companies functioned and, in particular, how they neglect one key aspect of the health of their employees: their mental health. This inspired a desire to create a solution to this problem. They are inspiring individuals who see a fundamental issue in the way an aspect of society functions, and set out to change it.

Their vision is to transform employer attitudes to mental health, removing the stigma so often associated with mental illness, so that it is viewed in the same vein as physical health. They are promoting mental wellbeing and establishing a culture of support and understanding. The second issue they saw was something rather more practical. When someone was looking for mental health support, it was hard to find. Trying to find a therapist was a long and tedious process. Addressing these two issues lies at the heart of what nilo.health aims to achieve.

WHAT DOES NILO.HEALTH PROVIDE?

Jonas and Ines have dedicated time to creating a company with a network of 'nilo.experts' (therapists and academic professionals), who can provide one-to-one advice and support. Their service involves working with employers to build an understanding of and commitment to the culture of mental health among their employees. They work with the employer to support their staff, embedding a new approach to employee support and creating a healthy and positive workplace for

everyone. This takes place with two services provided by nilo.health which are both available on their app.

nilo.sessions: Every employee has easy access to their 'nilo experts' to provide individualized mental support based on their needs and preferences, the ease of which is non-comparable to anything currently available. Flexibility is key to nilo.sessions, employees can access support via the wide range of options: video, phone or chat. This being even more of a selling point at this current time where the vast percentage of employees around the world are working from home.

nilo.hub: The 'place to go for all knowledge around mental health.' In seminars, workshops or webinars you can learn the tools to better deal with mental challenges or stressful situations. The programs are curated individually and flexibly for you. While some of the courses take place on-site at your company, most are offered digitally from their website.

The fundamental aim of nilo.health is to tackle mental health by changing its perception: that it's not just for ill or weak people, but for everyone. It was the passion to create a new mindset among major employers which appealed to the Vision Health Pioneers Incubator team. nilo.health joined seven other teams to be part of the nine-month program, supporting entrepreneurs with training, free coworking space, access to technology, business opportunities and equity-free funding.

Due to this sudden increase in the need for the service nilo.health provides, an opportunity presented itself; one they didn't expect to come so fast. Not following their anticipated timeline, Monday the 20th of April 2020 saw the launch of their pilot app for a company with around 600 employees. This was by no means an easy feat to achieve logistically. All of their work came down to creating the app at blistering speed, in only 20 days from the start of development to launch. Catalina Turlea, nilo.health's CTO and also a Co-Founder, was central to this development. It is clear that onboarding Catalina was one of the key milestones in the progression of nilo.health. Without this inclusion, the possibility of taking up an adventurous opportunity like this would

not have been possible. This adventure was by no means finished, they started working with two new companies from the 1st of June 2020.

From founding the company to the research and all the positive feedback from the new 'nilo experts,' to onboarding Catalina Turlea, and the launch of the nilo.health app - according to Jonas, "Our time in the incubator was a crazy roller coaster with the bringing in of 'nilo experts' and launching our nilo.health app." The future promises to be even more exciting.

“Our time in the incubator was a crazy roller coaster - with the bringing in of 'nilo experts' and launching our nilo.health app.”

Jonas Keil
Co-Founder

The future of geriatric care is smart and patient-centric



„You need to deal with the basics first and have the right resources for the basic care so you can really deep dive into the geriatric special needs”

Martina Viduka
Co-Founder

Martina Viduka is not quite sure what it was that first sparked her untiring passion for geriatric care, but she does know that there has always been a part of her that has felt drawn to and inspired by older generations.

“It’s funny, I don’t know where it came from, this soft spot for the elderly,” she says. “I think it’s something about the wisdom they bring to society, and the work they’ve put in. I feel like a lot of our western cultures just don’t appreciate that enough.”

Viduka’s fondness for the elderly prompted a career in nursing that lasted a decade, and which has provided firsthand experience and insight that has primed her for the next chapter of her life.

“I went into nursing because I wanted to somehow create a space, an age-friendly, caring space for people to age in the future,” she says. “I thought that nursing would be a good place to start, because you’re on the bedside and you really know and can see what was needed.”

DREAMING UP REVOLUTIONS IN GERIATRIC CARE

The whip-smart and charismatic Croatian-Canadian is now one-third of Vision Health Pioneers Incubator’s startup Advosense GmbH, having partnered up with Co-Founder, the Texas-born, Kentucky-raised Erin Webb in 2018. Webb brings to the table a fastidious, data-driven mindset alongside extensive management consultancy experience from working on projects for the Affordable Care Act.

As an entrepreneurial trio that includes British marketing specialist Grace-Anne Marius, their goal has been creating next-generation geriatric products. First stop: Smart incontinence briefs that use sensors to report to nurses when the patient needs to be changed.

“Right now, it’s just not possible to know when a patient is wet or not. You have to go in and physically check and there’s no best practice,” says Webb. Their product, which current-

ly has no direct competitor, features a passive and disposable sensor printed onto an incontinence brief which notifies the clinician when their patient is wet via their smartphone, tablet or computer.

The product stands to have a far-reaching impact. Over 200 million people currently suffer from urinary incontinence, an affliction which can bring about a host of complications, including pressure ulcers, falls and urinary tract infections.

Introducing smart briefs into the workflows at nursing homes and hospitals would save significant time, allowing clinicians to better care for patients’ complex needs. No event has highlighted the need for adaptations like these to be made more than the current pandemic, which has exposed shocking deficiencies in healthcare systems globally.

“You need to deal with the basics first and have the right resources for the basic care so you can really deep dive into the geriatric special needs,” says Viduka.

A WINNING COMBINATION

Webb and Viduka first met at Maastricht University, while both were enrolled in a Master of Science in Healthcare Policy, Innovation and Management.

Advosense was born in November 2018 in Berlin during the hackathon ‘Hacking Female Health’ – an event powered by Vision Health Pioneers Incubator partner Hacking Health, when the pair joined forces and worked as part of a team called PeriPower.

“Martina and I were sitting next to each other and I was, like, ‘Martina, you have to pitch something about geriatrics. Otherwise, all of these solutions are going to be about other problems that are not as inspiring to you,’” recalls Webb.

PeriPower emerged victorious, a success prompting the pair to consider taking their idea to the next level. Fast forward a couple of years, a place on Fraunhofer’s AHEAD program, a name change and then time in the first

Vision Health Pioneers Incubator. The team set their sights on eventually bringing their product to German hospitals and nursing homes, with a view of later pitching to North American and more European markets.

INGREDIENTS FOR THE LONG ROAD AHEAD

Martina described the end of their journey with the incubator, “I feel like a chick getting ready to leave the nest and I’m starting to get a little nervous about it. The program really gave me the courage to move forward. Before, I felt... imposter syndrome, I guess. I still kind of do. So, it gave me the support and the tools to feel that I can do this.”

Erin agrees that the convivial spirit and guidance have been a big help, especially in managing the uncertainty involved in building something completely from scratch.

“I think that a lot of the mentorship and also

being able to talk to the other teams who are going through the same thing has been very valuable,” she says, adding that the incubator’s flexibility and resilience from lockdown onwards has been much appreciated.

“Erin and I laid out the qualities and characteristics that we’re looking for as a team, as our team grows. Resilience was one of the top ones. What else?” asks Martina.

“Autonomy, trust, curiosity,” says Erin. “And commitment to the vision. Because it’s very important to really always be able to go back at the end of a hard day and say, ‘Okay. What’s driving this?’ I would say that that’s essential for an entrepreneur.”

That openness to seizing new opportunities as and when they arise is what led both women to join forces, turning a lifelong dream to transform geriatric care into an actionable mission, and finding inspiration, mentorship and a community along the way.

YONICORE

Inspired by mothers: Developed for women everywhere



The idea for YoniCore came from an unlikely but empowering place.

"I was working a few years ago with a gynaecologist on a research project where I designed pessaries, which are silicone devices that support the pelvic floor from inside of the vagina," explains Yair Kira, Co-Founder and CEO of YoniCore (formally known as Hers during their time in the Vision Health Pioneers Incubator). "After this project ended, I realized there are new technologies that can be introduced into this space."

Yair comes from the 3D printing world, and the potential of an individualized solution deeply inspired him. Yet YoniCore came from a much more personal place than that. During this same research project, Yair's mother approached him. "She said, 'Yair, maybe you can find a solution for my problem,'" he recalls.

From this seemingly innocuous conversation, the start-up's CEO became aware of the true extent of the need for their product. "The more I started to work on it, the more I saw women just openly talking about their pelvic health challenges."

And so YoniCore was born. With Co-Founder Hugo Silva by his side and later Linda Wonneberger, CMO, Yair cultivated a tangible, medically-based solution for pelvic floor dysfunctions (many of which may cause incontinence and other issues). They developed a soft silicone inflatable device providing individualized support for the pelvic organs. Used in tandem with the YoniCore app, which offers long-term pelvic floor training, women can take back control of their health – all while connecting with like-minded people and medical professionals.

"My mom always wanted to be the first customer," Yair confessed. "I think for her, it's great to know a solution that works for her will also be a solution for a million other women around the world."

YoniCore seeks to help women from across the globe overcome their pelvic health challenges at the earliest possible stages of their pelvic organ descensus. The device presents a smart and easy solution that women can use at home. Made with biocompatible silicone that inflates inside the vagina, the YoniCore pessary is a custom solution for women, designed with each person's pelvic floor in mind.

A simple electric pump allows women to save their individualized settings. From there, the pessary adjusts to the right fit for the patient in question. Women can wear it daily, similar to wearing a menstrual cup. The support of the device will provide them with immediate relief from the symptoms while strengthening their pelvic floor by interacting with the app and completing muscle training exercises throughout the day.

Yair explains the point of sale is all about offering an innovative solution: that of a connected device designed exclusively for women. The custom fit and long-term treatment approach is unprecedented in the women's health space.

ENTREPRENEURS EMPOWERING WOMEN

"Half of the women population will experience pelvic floor dysfunctions during their lifetime," the YoniCore founders describe. "But there is a big taboo around it."

"In history, women have been under-represented when it comes to medical issues," says Linda, CMO of YoniCore. "This is also a reason why women have learned to be ashamed of the health issues they have."

The YoniCore team makes a point of encouraging women to engage in candid discussions about their health. By doing so, women can begin to care for their pelvic floor far earlier than menopause, and as a result, shed light on common issues by treating them in the very beginning stages.

YoniCore's three founders have witnessed first-hand the impact of their approach. While shadowing doctors at the Pelvic Floor Center in Berlin, they interviewed a number of women patients and found just how important it is to provide a listening ear – to humanize medical care, if you will.

"Patients just want someone that will hear their story," Yair said of their role. "Someone who won't treat them as part of a machine, like a car that goes to the garage, gets something fixed and then goes away."

In the same way the entrepreneurs believe healthcare should be personalized, the FemTech startup has found that treatments should be personal. Women deserve the opportunity to tell their stories and be heard.

"So many women talk about it," Linda added. "They say, 'You know, I'm 55, and I love my life. But when I go outside, I have to calculate exactly where the next toilet is. If it's more than half an hour away, I cannot go to play with my grandchildren because I'm in fear of incontinence. So I'm staying at home.'"

THE POWER OF DIVERSITY IN FEMTECH

The YoniCore team is one of measurable diversity – not only in terms of gender and religion, but in background as well. "I think having a diverse team is a big advantage, Hugo and I both come from product design and industrial design, but we managed to do a separation," says Yair.

As CTO, Hugo is now spearheading the start-up's design and development – including the corporate identity, user-focused design of the app and hardware, all according to the regulatory requirements. Yair is focused on the broader view and the financial side of things. Linda, meanwhile, as CMO, offers a women's point of view, plus extensive experience as a female founder in the FemTech space. The seasoned entrepreneur is behind companies such as Comfexy GmbH, CUCA BY LINDA and LindaBra.

BEYOND THE INCUBATOR

"Our goal is to become one of the most successful FemTech companies by offering millions of women around the world an effective treatment for pelvic floor dysfunctions."

By continuing to increase awareness in this way, YoniCore will introduce women to a powerful network, allowing them to treat common issues and ultimately feel heard.

"Half of the women population will experience pelvic floor dysfunctions during their lifetime... but there is a big taboo around it."

Yair Kira
Co-Founder



„Many investors are now investing outside of their usual geographic areas. More and more investors from the Bay area are looking at European companies for instance.”

ALINE NOIZET

Founder, Digital Health Connector

Inu Health empowering women to find strength within and freedom from menstrual pain



From the age of ten, Adeline Caiado was tormented by excruciating menstrual pain and was made to feel that this was normal.

Speaking of the experience now, the 31-year-old, soft-spoken Brazilian describes having to wake up on the first day of her period in such a state of agony as to have to lie motionless in bed for hours waiting for the painkillers to kick in. Over the course of seven days, each month, she would have to endure what she describes as a sensation of having her insides twisted and squeezed at an intensity akin to being run over by a vehicle, and which spread itself beyond her pelvic area and through her intestines.

She lived with this each month since her first period, which announced itself with a pain so intense she could not attend school for a week. Each year from that point onwards she would approach a doctor, asking if there might be something wrong with her, or if there was something she could do to make the agony bearable. Doctors all said the same thing. That this was normal. That this was just what women had to go through each month.

"Not one doctor I went to suggested I might have endometriosis," she recalls. "I had to learn about (the condition) myself."

The penny dropped when Caiado was watching a TV show of a doctor explaining the condition, in which tissue similar to that which grows on the lining of the uterus grows outside of it, causing a great deal of discomfort and also potentially resulting in infertility.

It affects around ten percent of women, but, owing to long-standing taboos and misunderstandings around menstruation that are rooted in misogyny, it continues to be under-diagnosed and treated with indifference.

Owing to these attitudes, there's often quite a lag between the onset of the condition and the time at which its sufferer is diagnosed, forcing many, like Adeline, to suffer in silence for years.

Two years ago, Caiado moved to Berlin. During that time, she tracked down a specialist in endometriosis, who diagnosed her with its most severe stage, prescribing surgery to remove the endometrial growths responsible for the distress. She went through this surgery, which, alongside lifestyle adaptations she made, helped tremendously.

Adeline's two-decade-long ordeal is not all that unusual, although awareness of the condition has grown in recent years, owing in part to more and more women finding the courage to speak out.

"If no one tells us it's not normal, we're just going to keep thinking it is. Telling our daughters its normal, and it's not," says Isabelle Soleil, a German/Belgian psychologist who makes up one-third of Vision Health Pioneers startup Inu Health alongside Adeline Caiado, who handles the marketing, and passionate Co-Founder, Ana Catarina Rocha, who hails from Portugal.

"So we want to break the cycle and get people to talk about it. And for me, it's been really interesting, because ever since I've started cooperating on this project, I've been talking about it more. I feel like everyone knows at least one woman who has endometriosis, and they say, "oh yeah, I didn't realize how bad it was."

HOLISTIC SOLUTIONS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Inu Health aims to break the silence of endometriosis while providing practical solutions and holistic treatment via a sophisticated period tracker app that first offers a diagnosis, followed up by a 28-day-cognitive behavioral therapy program alongside a host of holistic tips and tricks for managing pain. Its target audience extends past women with endometriosis, to encompass all women who suffer from painful periods in general.

The project, whose name derives from the idea that women have ample resources within themselves to heal and thrive, is the brainchild

„We only start working from a position of strength if we begin to embrace the way we are designed”

Ana Catarina Roche
Co-Founder

of Ana Catarina Roche. "I want to give women the power of choice, through this app," she says, describing how many women attempt to manage their pain through birth control pills, which can be problematic for the body.

Ana Catarina discovered a research project in Australia that used cognitive behavioral therapy to help sufferers develop coping strategies. "I'm really fascinated with this psychology and how to trick the mind in order to change the state of the body," Ana Catarina says.

The missing piece, in the form of a Co-Founder who could bring insights into the mental health aspect of the project, was found in Isabelle Soleil, a psychologist introduced to Ana Catarina by fellow Vision Health Pioneer's Incubator entrepreneurs nilo.health.

The Inu Health entrepreneurs are excited about the road ahead, the possible avenues they can take with their startup, and how their

work can lead the charge in serving the large number of women who suffer.

"I say this quote over and over again, but we only start working from a position of strength if we begin to embrace the way we are designed," says Ana Catarina.

For Adeline, embracing the way she is designed has come in the form of making big changes to her lifestyle, which she can now do, being furnished with a much greater understanding of her own body and her condition.

Her surgery was a success, and alongside a shift in diet – she avoids processed food, dairy, and gluten – and a host of insights accumulated via the app, her pain is

nowhere near as intense as it once was, and she can live an unencumbered life.

"I feel really great now I have these solutions, and I know what is happening to my body. I don't have extreme pain for days now, I just take one painkiller and that's enough," she says.

Smart support in your back pocket



“I have led skill groups and witnessed many patients suffer each day with challenges that come with borderline personality disorder.”

Anne Florin
Co-Founder

Anne Florin and Patrick Hartwig created the digital solution MySkills to help borderline personality patients cope with everyday challenges and crises common to the disorder.

Affecting over a million people in Germany, borderline personality disorder is characterized by impulsiveness, instability of emotions and mood, identity and interpersonal relationships.

How did the idea to set up MySkills come about?

Anne Florin, Co-Founder, is a therapist for social professions and has specialized in dialectical behavioral therapy when working with people with borderline personality disorder.

“I have led skill groups and witnessed many patients suffer each day with challenges that come with the disorder. Currently, patients are supported by being handed many thick skills manuals and a lot of paperwork, which is often impractical in everyday life. Besides, in moments of high stress, patients often can't remember the exercises they need to do. So, I thought that a digital solution could help, and many people I spoke to who specialize in the subject agreed. Patrick is a UX/UI designer, and when I told him about the idea, he was immediately enthusiastic.”

They explain how borderline personality disorder manifests itself. “Unfortunately, the disorder, which is often associated with self-harm and problematic interpersonal behavior, is highly stigmatized. The truth is that borderline personality disorder affects its sufferers in very different ways.”

People with the disorder have emotional reactions that are on average nine times stronger than what is commonly experienced, and take a lot longer to return to their initial emotional level. 85 percent of sufferers self-harm in some way (whether that is cutting, burning, having eating fits, threatening with suicide or engaging in risky behavior). The suicide rate for the disorder is at 5 to 10 percent, with suicide attempts at around 60 percent of sufferers. Those with the disorder tend to have strong states of tension throughout the day.

Anne explains more about treatment, “Approximately 80 percent of people affected by BPD receive psychiatric or psychotherapeutic treatment. The chance of a complete cure of the borderline disorder is relatively small. The earlier and the more intense the outbreak of the disorder, the lower the probability of a cure. The gender distribution is 50 percent women and 50 percent men, but with women receiving treatment significantly more often.”

It must be said that the disorder manifests differently in everyone, so it is often difficult to make a diagnosis. Not everyone with BPD hurts themselves or is impulsive. Others instead feel an inner emptiness and withdraw.”

Patrick Hartwig, Co-Founder, has ten years of professional experience as a UX/UI designer and design-lead. A passionate product designer, he enjoys creating positive professional experiences, and in this case can apply his knowledge to developing a sustainable, appealing, user-centered and useful product. Anne has worked for six years on a certified Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) ward with people with Borderline Personality Disorder. “I know all about the challenges that come with the disorder, alongside what treatment helps on a day-to-day basis.”

Patrick and Anne work with a network of experts who continuously check their content to ensure its quality, including a data protection officer, various DBT therapists, the Borderline Network, a professor, and the patients themselves.

Anne explains, “They support us in helping validate and further develop our product, while sharing valuable insights from their everyday life with us. The president of the DBT umbrella organization, Christian Stiglmayr, is an incredibly experienced advocate and partner for MySkills whose support we are very grateful for.”

IN GERMANY, ABOUT 1.4 MILLION PEOPLE ARE AFFECTED BY BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER

Usual waiting periods are three to nine months to get treatment. This means that some patients feel alone and lack the strategies needed to manage their disorder. In times of high stress, they may struggle to remember skills that can help mitigate their tension, and so resort to the familiar coping mechanism that is self-injury.

This is where MySkills comes in: MySkills is the digital extension of the widely used dialectical behavioral therapy, which has the highest evidence level in treating borderline personality disorder and is the most common procedure in Germany. It's an always-available mobile digital companion which interactively, intelligently, and individually supports the patient in implementing their therapy more effectively in everyday life.

The app currently includes over 150 exercises (Skills), analysis, educational content, and more.

The target market is people diagnosed with a borderline personality disorder. In the future they hope to have a prescription-only digital health application (DiGA) for doctors, therapists, and health insurance companies throughout Germany.

Anne shares their time in the Vision Health Pioneers Incubator. “It's the best thing that could have happened to us. Before this, we were both working full-time in other jobs while developing MySkills on the side. There are an incredible number of great mentors who have supported us. It's helpful to be able to interact with them and develop yourself further. We owe a lot to Vision Health Pioneers Incubator, mostly in being able to turn an idea into a business. There were ups and downs, but the learning process was enormous. We really can only recommend that everyone goes through this program.”

”

„Get your product out,
test and iterate as often as
possible, learn by exploring,
not by discussing everything
in theory”

DR. EVA ELISA SCHNEIDER

Founder, Mental Health Lab

“



The startup transforming how we view gut health



Founded by Junayd Mahmood and Isabel Sousa, biotikur creates evidence-based products designed to balance and maintain the gut microbiome.

The objective at biotikur is simple: to leverage the new science on gut health and the microbiome to enhance a number of other outcomes linked to the digestive system.

These include common symptoms such as gas and bloating, along with less obvious (but no less relevant) outcomes like mood, weight and metabolism. While the research is admittedly new – 80% of existing studies on the gut microbiome have been published in the last five years – scientists are increasingly aware of its true impact.

The marketing, during the incubation period, was handled by Emily Phillips (Brand, Content & Community Lead). She described what consumers can anticipate from the startup, “bold products developed at the cutting edge of nutritional and scientific research.” During their time with Vision Health Pioneers Incubator, biotikur completed multiple product tests and launched two product lines to the market.

Junayd explains that biotikur is more than a unique product. He and his team don’t simply want to create a pill people can take to avoid changing anything else in their lifestyle. “That’s kind of an issue. The current system isn’t set up to change any of the root causes of health problems. It just addresses the symptoms.”

This is where biotikur comes in. The young startup aims to embed each product with consciousness and awareness about the body – about what makes people feel good and perform better. There’s also an element of improving one’s nutrition, with the idea of each person taking their health into their own hands.

“There’s a growing sense that all is not well,” says Emily. “That the planet isn’t well, and that we aren’t well too.”

To address this, they are revisiting what people consume. While there are no quick-fix solutions, biotikur is working to improve awareness of gut-healthy lifestyles.

INSPIRED BY FAMILY: DEVELOPED FOR PEOPLE EVERYWHERE

Biotikur are creating a sense of balance in the gut and beyond. The gut contains trillions of bacteria, and when the bad bacteria overtake the good, an imbalance (called dysbiosis) can happen.

Dysbiosis can, however, be restored. For one of the startup’s cofounders, restoring it is very much a family affair. “The idea for biotikur originally was because it was becoming more and more of a topic for me personally,” explains Junayd. “Both of my younger siblings have quite significant digestive issues.”

Junayd’s younger sister has Coeliac disease – a serious autoimmune disease. His younger brother was prescribed some serious antibiotics around the age of 12 or 13, and he



struggled with intensive digestive distress for months at a time. His parents are also type 2 diabetics, which further reinforced his interest in the topic. (With diabetes linked closely to gut health.)

From there, Junayd and his team explored the scientific elements of the gut. It’s the blend of science and personal history that fuels the company today.

With COVID-19 shutting down labs and GMP production facilities, there have been plenty of setbacks this past year in particular. Yet biotikur persists. In the next few years, they hope to cement their reputation as Europe’s premium brand of reference for evidence-based, cutting-edge gut health products.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE BIOTIKUR PRODUCT LINE

The Berlin-based startup strives to be approachable and empathetic. “One tremendous asset that we have is that biotikur is personal, and it’s authentic. The products and the ethos we’re putting out are really aligned with what we want to see in the world.”

This same ethos has driven the development of their first product: the 14-Day Regimen, which features a blend of probiotics and prebiotics, and includes a rectal application.

What was novel about the product, and supported by evidence, was the direct application of probiotics in order to maximize the levels of good bacteria in the gut microbiome.

Since then biotikur has released additional products – including oral products – based on peer-reviewed science and real challenges people face. The team believes in integrating an educational element into each product, or something that directly helps consumers improve their nutrition and

overall gut health.

The startup launched biotikur balance as an all-in-one prebiotic and daily probiotic. This daily oral pre- and probiotic system is specially formulated to promote and maintain balance in people’s gut microbiome. Consumers receive probiotic capsules which introduce high concentrations of beneficial bacteria into the digestive tract.

INCUBATION TIME

During their time with Vision Health Pioneers, biotikur were focused on their product above all else: on getting it developed, tested and in the hands of their users.

“Just that support, and being able to learn from the journeys of other startups in the cohort, was super valuable for us,” says Junayd. “I don’t think we could have achieved what we did on the scale we did, and as quickly as we did, without the support.”

“With startups, there are always more questions than answers,” Junayd continues. “It’s really easy to feel overwhelmed, but Vision Health Pioneers Incubator has that environment of energy and fresh motivation.”

When there are successes, of any size, a group environment can make all the difference. There’s a genuine strength in numbers, and there is a great benefit from being around people who are going through similar experiences.

“The current system isn’t set up to change any of the root causes of health problems. It just addresses the symptoms.”

Junayd Mahmood
Co-Founder

Spotlight on the startup offering at-home digital personalized cardiotherapy



What do you get when you combine a software developer, a programmer and an emergency medicine professional and mix it with an innovative idea? The answer is My Paramedic.

Founded in Belarus by husband-and-wife team Dmitry Solovyov, CEO, and Olga Solovyova, CMO – along with software developer and CTO Denis Moskalev – the company has created a mobile solution that helps people recover from a heart attack at home.

You might think of it as an intelligent pocket cardiotherapy assistant.

REDUCING LONG-TERM RISK WITH AT-HOME DIGITAL PERSONALIZED CARDIOTHERAPY

In addition to facilitating recovery, My Paramedic motivates people to maintain their health balance and reduce their risk of experiencing an additional cardiac event.

Rooted in technology, users perform physical exercises by playing an interactive game. The built-in AI monitors each patient's condition by asking a few questions and reading their vital signs through smart wearable devices – and then analyzing data throughout this process like a real doctor usually does.

"We're not a rehabilitation app," clarifies Dmitry. "My Paramedic is a mobile app that provides personalized cardiac therapy and support for patients at home."

The app isn't a telemedicine platform, nor is it meant to substitute doctors, medical treatments or prescription drugs. Rather, My Paramedic offers digital therapeutics. Patients can use the product between doctor's appointments and adhere to the therapies if they experience specific symptoms. It's also ideal for those in search of additional cardiac treatment rehabilitation, or a post-rehabilitation model.

"We are more like a digital assistant with digital therapy," the startup's CEO explains. "Our mobile app supports and motivates users during the whole process, and we focus on personalization."

With all the content based on clinically-backed German cardio guidelines, the app can either integrate with the user's wearable

devices or address the individual's needs based on information they input themselves.

"If the user doesn't have, or doesn't want to use their device, the mobile app will ask a few more questions and make a decision on how to update the individual therapy plan," says Dmitry.

THE BENEFITS OF CARDIAC REHAB AND POST-REHABILITATION ARE EXPANSIVE

Patients are:

- 40% less likely to experience a repeat cardiovascular event
- 25% less likely to die as a result of a cardiovascular event
- 38% to 53% increase in patients' rate of return to work, with an overall cost savings of \$12,000 per person

A compelling part of the app is that users don't have to complete the exercises alone. My Paramedic is home to a personal digital assistant named Hearty, who is available on the mobile app to help people achieve their goals, earn rewards and leverage the support of their community.

"We believe that therapy must be intelligent," says Dmitry. "It doesn't have to be boring, and our product doesn't change your past – but it can improve your future."

STARTUPS AND THE POWER OF PIVOTING

The idea for My Paramedic came from the CEO's background working in Emergency Medical Teams (EMT). From Monday through Friday, he worked as a software engineer – and on weekends, he was a paramedic assistant.

That was how he met Olga Solovyova, a paramedic and his boss on occasion. In their native Belarus, paramedics can make decisions just like any doctor. When, one day, their colleague felt unwell and worried she could lose

consciousness, Dmitry had an idea: Wouldn't it be great to call an ambulance automatically, based on a person's vital signs, to save time?

This was the initial concept of My Paramedic. However, a number of barriers forced the team to pivot. All the software and hardware components of the platform, they learned, would have to be medically-certified. (The smartwatches and fitness trackers they hoped to use didn't have the certifications they needed, which was the first setback they faced.)

They switched gears entirely – and the three Co-Founders decided to focus on recovery from heart attack and the digitalization of cardiac therapies. "We kept almost everything from our MVP," says Dmitry. Yet pivoting proved challenging in many ways.

"It was hard to take one step back and do the same job again with a different focus. But we did it," admits the CEO.

They often repeat one famous phrase to remain driven during the most uncertain times. The translation is: Rise and rise again until lambs become lions.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS WITH VISION HEALTH PIONEERS

The My Paramedic Co-Founders claim they've had an empowering and informative experience in the Vision Health Pioneers Incubator.

"It's about people who want to change the world with you," says Dmitry. "We got more than just support. We appreciate every person who shared their experience and knowledge with us."

In addition, Dmitry claims Vision Health Pioneers Incubator gave him the tools he needed to start thinking like a businessperson. "It's the main benefit that I received," says My Paramedic's CEO. "And this factor affected me, our team and our product – and it's forced us to take a step back to avoid potentially more serious mistakes."

While roadblocks and other challenges cause stress, they're better addressed early on in the startup game than several years down the road. My Paramedic has pivoted –

but the young company is now on a path from which all parties can benefit. The platform offers an enticing approach to at-home cardiac rehab users won't want to miss.

“My Paramedic is a mobile app that provides personalized cardiac therapy and support for patients at home.”

Dmitry Solovyov
CEO, My Paramedic



Thank you to our community

At Vision Health Pioneers Incubator we are surrounded by a community who support the startups and overall the healthcare industry in Berlin and beyond.

We want to say a big thank you to the established companies, mentors, coaches, fellow entrepreneurs, NGOs, governmental organisations, investors and dedicated healthcare innovators who are all a cornerstone of what is achieved at Vision Health Pioneers Incubator.

To say that the incubator and the program isn't possible without those around it, is an understatement. Our startups benefit immensely from the wisdom and guidance from the mentors, the input and devotion of the coaches, the access and knowledge with our partners - the list goes on.

Over the next two pages we share the insights from a handful of our dedicated mentors. Their passion is echoed by so many of those in the community and we are delighted to continue to build something special, together with everyone around Vision Health Pioneers Incubator.

The future is all the better, when we come together to innovate healthcare.

Mentor Laura Nelde on Berlin's strong and supportive digital healthcare world



Laura Nelde is a cherished mentor at Vision Health Pioneers Incubator and is Flying Health's Startup Relationship Manager, where she works at the forefront of tomorrow's healthcare, guiding industry leaders and entrepreneurs and working with startups in-house to develop new digital drugs. She holds an MPhil in Bioscience Enterprise from the University of Cambridge, and speaks passionately about the need for Germany's wider healthcare community to embrace the technologies and treatments fostered in digital health.

You might also be curious to know that she's pretty crafty and into DIY fashion. When she's not working, she scours the web for designs and puts together all sorts of pieces using her grandmother's sewing machine. As a mentor, she's appreciated for her open mind, and stresses the importance of intellectual flexibility:

"I always say that what I am offering is one perspective, one piece in the puzzle. You have to speak to so many different people – there are so many stakeholders involved. There are many opinions you have to take into account."

WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE BEST STEPS TO TAKE TO ENTER THE DIGITAL HEALTH SPACE?

When it comes to learning about the problem you are trying to address, it's important to understand the traditional system and the current patient journey. You need to know which stakeholders are involved and how your proposed solution changes the current care path and offers value to all those involved.

It's also a good idea to talk to experts: People who understand the healthcare system and people who have developed medical products before. Do not underestimate medical device regulations and consider that in your product development from the beginning.

And always keep in mind: the user might not be your customer.

WHAT DIGITAL HEALTH ISSUES ARE PARTICULARLY ON YOUR MIND AT THE MOMENT?

Among my many interests, I'm motivated to tackle the subject of how to empower the patient by enabling a wide range of treatment modalities that include digital solutions– besides traditional options including pharmacotherapy and face to face appointments. This is so that each patient is able to choose the type of care that is most suitable and most effective for them at that point in time.

It's also important to me to support digital health startups entering the market, so that they can make new solutions accessible to patients in Germany and allow innovations developed in Germany to stay here instead of leaving for opportunities abroad.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO BE A MENTOR?

I love sharing and passing on the knowledge and insights I have gained to support startups/teams that might be new to the healthcare sector. I'm passionate about bringing their ideas to reality as much as I am bringing innovation to the patients. The healthcare system is complex and without support, these endeavors can be difficult.

I also really enjoy meeting teams at an early stage and get excited about learning about new ideas with the potential to transform a part of care delivery.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE DIGITAL HEALTH SPACE IN BERLIN– WHAT ARE ITS RELATIVE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES?

Berlin's digital health community is strong. Its startups rarely see each other as competition, but operate as allies working together to further develop digital health and make it an integral part of our healthcare system.

Before Covid19, we also enjoyed all the opportunities we had to attend events and get to know startups and stakeholders. Though now, with Covid19, our location is no longer our greatest asset. We've lost networking opportunities. But the flip side is that startups located outside Berlin can attend events here.

WHAT PERSONAL QUALITIES MAKE THE MOST EFFECTIVE FOUNDER IN THIS SPACE?

Some of the most effective founders we have met were those teams that combined expertise from science/medical backgrounds and business backgrounds.

This will likely not be a single person, but a founding team that has different backgrounds is tremendously helpful in understanding all aspects of what it takes to build a sustainable business while making sure that the proposed solution is addressing a medical need and built according to medical device and clinical evidence standards.

HOW DO YOU PICTURE THE DIGITAL HEALTH SPACE IN GERMANY LOOKING IN FIVE YEARS?

I imagine that the underlying national ehealth infrastructure will be widely adopted by then, building a strong backbone for new innovations to be developed and implemented.

I hope that many startups will continue to innovate and work together with existing players across sectors in healthcare to transform care delivery and improve outcomes.

I think there will also be a wide range of apps available on prescription that have become standard options across the treatment spectrum for physicians, and which will hopefully expand beyond the outpatient sector in supporting patients across the care continuum.

WHAT CULTURAL PRODUCT WOULD YOU TAKE WITH YOU ON A DESERTED ISLAND?

I'd want to have access to my favorite podcasts – then I'd have new episodes to look forward to! My top three podcasts are: Alles gesagt, Der Tag and Visionäre Der Gesundheit.

"Berlin's digital health community is strong. Its startups rarely see each other as competition, but operate as allies working together to further develop digital health and make it an integral part of our healthcare system."

Laura Nelde
Mentor, Vision Health Pioneers Incubator



A spotlight on our mentor Johannes Starlinger

“Berlin has a great mix of creative power and all the different skills needed to drive innovation in digital health”

Johannes Starlinger
Mentor, Vision Health Pioneers Incubator

Dr.-Ing. Dr.med.univ. Johannes Starlinger is an experienced digital health and information technology consultant, developer, researcher and interdisciplinary project manager. Having spent significant time in academia with a background in medicine and computer science and a TÜV certification as a specialist for software as a medical device, Johannes is a man of many hats.

He supports companies and young startups in the field of digital health, founded his own company Howto Health – Digital Business Solutions, still teaches occasionally, is a devoted parent and an invaluable mentor to our startup teams at Vision Health Pioneers Incubator.

WHAT ISSUES OR TOPICS ARE YOU MOST MOTIVATED TO TACKLE, WHAT DIGITAL HEALTH ISSUES ARE PARTICULARLY ON YOUR MIND AT THE MOMENT?

“What I find extremely fascinating at the moment is the forthcoming shift from classic, episodic healthcare provided in facilities towards a more continuous care-for-health with the patient themselves as the point-of-care – whether they happen to be visiting a physician or are enjoying healthcare from the comfort of their home.”

We are currently seeing big tech companies starting to move into this space already and I think it will be very interesting to see how this shift not only transforms the healthcare market, but even more will transform healthcare as we know it.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE OR CHARACTERIZE YOUR DIGITAL HEALTH JOURNEY?

Well, at the end of my medical studies, I realized how fascinating the possibilities are that digital technologies provide – for applications both within and outside the healthcare system. So I went ahead and studied computer science right after finishing my medical degree. I was lucky to already start exploring the area of biomedical informatics as a working student and continued working as a research-

er in this area for over a decade. My focus was on data-powered applications, including, for example, software architecture for distributed processing of biomedical data, the use of genetic data to improve cancer treatment, or the use of data from general practice patient records to predict dementia.

Next to working as a researcher, I've been providing IT and digital health consulting and software development services for more than 7 years now and, eventually, found that I enjoy this product-oriented type of work slightly more than the more publication-oriented goals academic research strives for.

It was an eye-opener for me to do regulatory training and learn about how to actually transform research findings and ideas into medical device products. It still feels like the regulatory know-how was my personal missing puzzle piece to be able to fully interweave my medical and computer science knowledge in the area of digital health.

So I finally decided to leave academia (for the most part, I still do some teaching) and fully went into the industry with my own company some 1.5 years ago. The process is still ongoing. I'm very happy with who it's transforming me into.

WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGES IN WORKING THROUGH A PANDEMIC, AND HAVE YOU FOUND ANY SILVER LININGS?

As a father of three, managing home kindergarten, homeschooling, and home office all at the same time during the second lockdown was incredibly challenging, not to say nerve-wracking. As with most challenges, there was a great deal of learning to take from it (after getting over the wracked nerves), both on a personal and on a professional level. I hope we don't have to go through that again, though.

DID YOU ALWAYS WANT TO BE A LEADER IN DIGITAL HEALTH?

I'm not actually sure I see myself as a leader, I must admit. I'm someone with rather deep knowledge and experience on a rather broad spectrum of all the elements important in digital health: med, tech, and regulatory. I love to use this knowledge to enable change in the way health and healthcare are delivered and consumed. That being said, I tend to have strong opinions and a certain vision for what healthcare may look like 10 to 20 years from now – and especially how we as individuals make use of the tools given to us to care for our own health much more than we do today, and in a more holistic way.

My alternative path would have been non-health tech. There are so many awesome things digital technology can do in all sorts of areas. And it's just fun, too.

HOW WOULD YOU CHARACTERIZE THE DIGITAL HEALTH SPACE IN BERLIN/GERMANY?

I think Berlin (and selected other places in Germany) has a great mix of creative power and all the different skills needed to drive innovation in digital health. This includes a vibrant startup scene, various funding opportunities, a plethora of biotech industry and startup-friendly universities. At the same time, I think the interlink between digital health innovation driven from outside the healthcare system, e.g., by innovative startups, on the one hand, and participants within the healthcare system on the other hand, could be much better. Currently, it's often very difficult for startups to engage with partners within healthcare.

Mentor, mediator, design thinker, product designer: Introducing Susanne Feldt



“There is real momentum for digital health.” So says mentor, nature lover, avid photographer and gardener Susanne Feldt, who helps healthcare startups develop data-driven products, services, and business models, by raising the bar on customer experience.

Passionate about digital transformation in healthcare, and especially fascinated by applied AI and analytics applications, she has great advice and insights for our growing community. Susanne also once spent ten days in total silence at a monastery in Nepal, an experience she describes as ‘life-changing’.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE BEST STEPS TO TAKE TO ENTER THE DIGITAL HEALTH SPACE?

The global community is growing. The healthcare market is quite specific and requires knowledge about challenges and ongoing trends. Try to join online conferences, meetups or social media groups (on LinkedIn, Clubhouse, etc) and take part in the conversations.

WHICH OF YOUR PROFESSIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

I trained many of my former colleagues and clients to use the user-centered innovation mindset (Design Thinking). Once people understand the value in user-centered-design, they include that in everything they build. It's hard to believe that people often develop products without ever talking to their customers.

WHAT DIGITAL HEALTH ISSUES ARE ON YOUR MIND AT THE MOMENT?

Personally, I'm super interested in the use of AI/ machine learning for human-centered healthcare innovation. In my current project, I conduct user research on the brain tumor workflow. It's a bit crazy, for some rare diseases it often takes a long time until patients get a proper examination. Sadly, it depends on individual healthcare providers (HCP) and their en-

gagement if patients receive the best possible treatment. Treatments need to become more personalized, and therefore HCPs need more time for individual cases. I believe that digitalisation and data analysis can support HCPs in providing better diagnoses and addressing individual needs.

WHAT STRATEGIES HAVE YOU USED TO STAY SANE AND PRODUCTIVE THROUGH COVID?

I started my freelance UX career just at the beginning of the pandemic. The decision was made before then, and I couldn't reverse it. But so far, it all worked out well. I supported a small founding team with their product launch and we still met in the office until the beginning of winter. As I had this big change planned, the effects on my work due to COVID were minor.

Intellectually the year 2020 was very exciting for digital health. The general public became aware of this topic; people donated their health data for research and tried telemedicine consultations for the first time in their lives. We saw that a lot was possible and that creativity matters in solving problems.

WHAT ARE THE QUALITIES OF AN EFFECTIVE MENTOR ESPECIALLY IN THIS SPACE AND WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO BE A MENTOR?

I had a few mentors that inspired me on my work journey. These were always people that took the time to listen to me, even when they were super busy themselves. They did this without asking anything in return; they were purely interested and generous. For the same reason, I want to mentor. I enjoy teaching, problem-solving and connecting people. I can learn from the startups and their journeys, too.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR DIGITAL HEALTH JOURNEY? WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF THE HIGHS AND LOWS?

The projects I've had in healthcare were by far the most interesting projects I had in my design career. It's pretty exciting to design digital infrastructures for diagnostics. What are the lows? Definitely the strict data protection and compliance regulations; these regulations are often not designed and thought out for digital health applications. The documentation efforts are gigantic; in trials, a code freeze is required and even bug fixing causes problems, overall this makes it hard to develop in an agile setup.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE DIGITAL HEALTH SPACE IN BERLIN?

Healthcare is a highly political field. As the government sits here in Berlin, we might have a location advantage in Berlin. The city is vibrant and interesting for innovative startups that develop data-driven tech solutions. The most important health incubators sit in the capital. Germany is definitely an interesting healthcare market with over 73 million public insured people. And within the limits of the GDPR data protection regulation, startups have to design compliant solutions. One weakness is Germany's federalism. So regardless of where the startup is, they need to handle this madness of different state regulations.

WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGES IN WORKING THROUGH A PANDEMIC, AND HAVE YOU FOUND ANY SILVER LININGS?

As I work in the digital field, I'm pretty lucky that COVID did not affect my work that much. I'm used to working with remote teams, and often I had to fly to my clients for short alignment meetings. I'm thankful that we all learned new digital processes and that it matters less where in the world a person is. Now I could live on an island and still do my job.

Nevertheless, having all these social limitations is hard and I also struggle with this. I wish we find better ways than lockdowns to handle this situation. The insecurity and the difficult (work) circumstances that some people are facing is troubling.

HOW DO YOU PICTURE THE DIGITAL HEALTH SPACE IN GERMANY LOOKING IN FIVE YEARS?

Five years is a short time for innovation in a highly regulated field. I see that we finally have the electronic-patient-file and that this leads to more transparency about costs and procedures in the healthcare field. I hope that patients understand that they have a right to participate in the dialog about their health. However, this awareness might take even longer.

“There is real momentum for digital health”

Susanne Feldt
Mentor, Vision Health Pioneers Incubator

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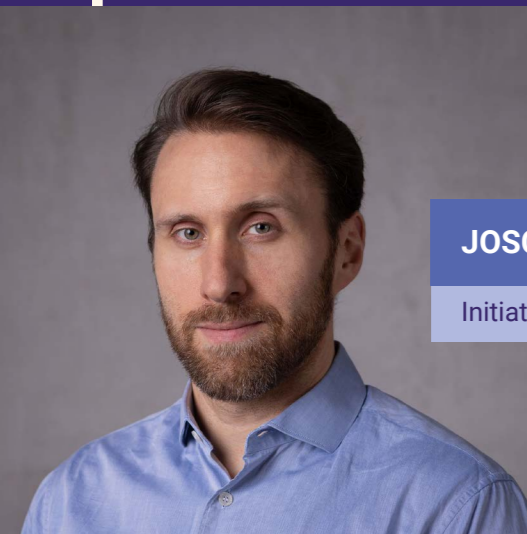
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The Vision Health Pioneers Incubator Team



JOSCHA HOFFERBERT

Initiator



LUCIE AVELANGE

Program Manager



CAROLINE WETZEL

Innovation Scout



MAREN LESCHE

Initiator



BEN V BUTLER

Marketing & Communications
Manager



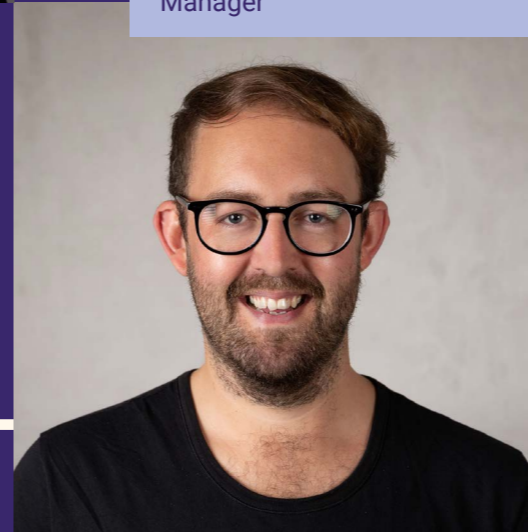
SANDRA LEONG

Community Manager



CARMEN POHL

Operations Manager



ULRIKE HEMPEL

Communications Assistant

”



„Digital healthcare is a great way of reaching out to people that might otherwise not be able to get care”

DR KEITH GRIMES

Clinical Artificial Intelligence &
Innovation Director, Babylon Health

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Maren@visionhealthpioneers.de

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