



Client spotlight...

Safar Primary Care Ltd

Overcoming challenges as a start-up company from an initial idea to launch, how Safar have adapted to an ever-changing world and market place.

In the first of a new series of digital client spotlights, Hempsons caught up with Chris Moore (project manager) at Safar Primary Care Ltd to discuss how Safar has grown as a business and adapted to the challenges it has faced.

Safar Primary Care Ltd has faced several challenges in its short lifetime – but this innovative video-conferencing company set up by two GPs is now planning to launch into new markets.

Safar was the brainchild of Dr Farrukh Shamshad and Dr Saima Qurban four years ago. They could see the need to link patients and clinicians through an easy to use video conferencing system which would allow for an alternative to face-to-face scheduled consultations.

At the time, there were very few companies in this field and some of the products were relatively poor quality or did not offer an appropriate level of security or the functionality required in the healthcare sector.

But the GPs decided they needed help to develop the company and were introduced to Chris Moore, through Hempsons which was already helping them with legal matters. *"We met up and decided we would all get along famously,"* says Mr Moore, who is now project manager at the company. The company then engaged a marketing partner (Beyond) and an IT development specialist (Apacio).

The unique selling point of their product was that it could be used anywhere in the world, he says. *"It could also be used for cross-border prescribing and was very easy for users to access."* GPs would be able to prescribe and the patient then collect from a nearby pharmacy – even if they were in another country at the time.

Europe was identified as a big potential market for the product – but then along came Brexit and suddenly the company's plans were thrown up in the air. Cross-border prescriptions suddenly looked much harder.

But the company was undeterred and concentrated on how a customised product for the NHS could be developed – GP&Me. This is now being piloted among practices in North East Essex and allows scheduled appointments between GP and patient through an app for smartphones and tablets.

The coronavirus crisis has given such technology an enormous boost. Within weeks, many GP practices – and hospital doctors – have turned to virtual consultations to avoid close contact with patients and save them having to come into surgeries or hospitals.

It's probably too early to say whether this shift will be permanent, but many healthcare professionals appear to have adapted well to a different way of working.

Video conferencing is now a crowded market with several big players. *"GP&Me can't really compete with some of these,"* says Mr Moore, *"but it can play its part."*

"We have tried not to be distracted by Covid-19 but we did offer to make it free to anyone who wanted to use it," he says. *"The early signs are good and we are learning as we go. We are already beginning to plan the beta version."*

One of the strengths of the platform is it has been through all the regulatory hoops in the UK – which should stand it in good stead if it is used elsewhere. *"That was good for us because it meant we really had to drill down on data protection. We had to futureproof it and create something simple that could run alongside existing NHS networks,"* says Mr Moore. It also offers excellent audio and video quality, and has a recording facility.

But he says that such advantages don't always last very long and the market is full of companies with deeper pockets. With this in mind, the company is now considering a change in focus. The original Safar idea – of bookable video appointments – will stay centre stage but the company is looking to move into markets in other parts of the world. Nor will it just be confined to its use in health settings. *"We are looking at Asia, as the doctors know India and Pakistan very well, but also the Gulf States,"* says Mr Moore.

Throughout the development of the company, it has worked closely with Hempsons. *"They were absolutely with us along the way. We have worked with a number of colleagues at Hempsons and not one has disappointed,"* he says. *"They know the health sector very well, which is incredibly helpful, but they have also used their own networks and contacts to assist us."*

" Matt Donnelly, our main contact, has been just brilliant. He always does what he says he is going to do and he does it when he says he is going to do it! "

