



HEALTHWARE

187 SHARES

HEALTHWARE

THE RX YOU FILL AT THE APP STORE

BLUESTAR, WHICH HELPS PEOPLE WITH CHRONIC DISEASES LIVE SMARTER, HAS BEEN CLEARED BY THE FDA

BY NAYANA DAVIS

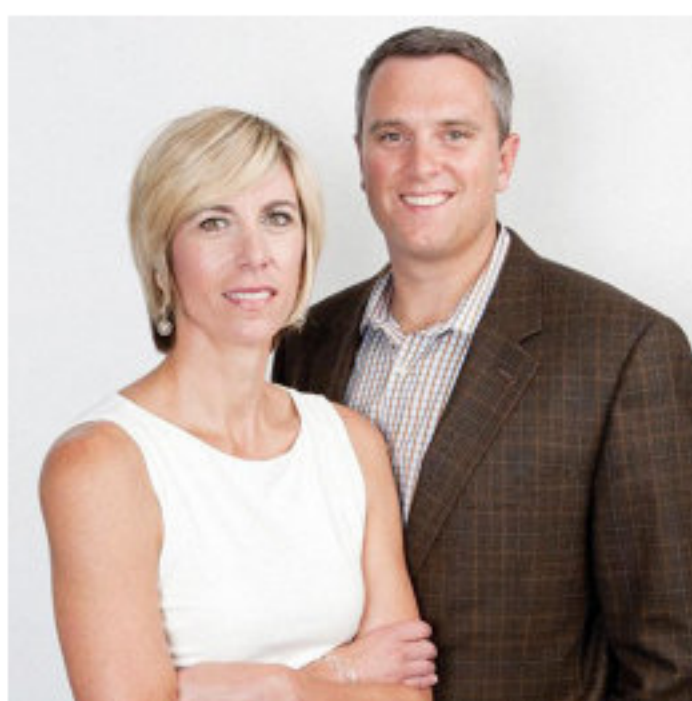
Dr. Suzanne Clough, an endocrinologist, decided to go into diabetes care because it's a disease where you can make a perceptible difference: Patients following her treatment plan could see tangible improvement in their health.

But, seeing patients only a few times a year, it was difficult for her to get a real idea of their habits.

"I started noticing that people weren't always carrying their glucose levels, but everyone had a cell phone," she said.

Soon after the observation, in 2005, Clough partnered with her brother, Ryan Sysko, who worked in financial services, and founded WellDoc, a health care technology company prescribing mobile applications that monitor chronic illnesses.

The company, which has raised about \$40 million from private investors, recently launched its first major effort: BlueStar, a prescription-only mobile app intended to help patients manage type 2 diabetes, was unveiled at this summer's Digital Health Summer Summit in San Francisco.



Dr. Suzanne Clough and Ryan Sysko

The app allows patients to input data about their glucose levels, diet, exercise, and other notes, and then receive instant medical advice. "We now have a way for patients to take their physician's voice home with them," says Sysko, who is the CEO of WellDoc. The app also produces detailed health reports for physicians to review prior to visits with patients.

BlueStar is the first mobile disease therapy to receive clearance from the Food and Drug Administration.

Chris Bergstrom, chief strategy and commercial development officer of the company, said the data in the app--from both the patient's medical history and their daily inputs--allow BlueStar to provide personalized guidance. For example, if a user has a low glucose reading, the app will provide instructions such as eating a certain amount of fast-acting carbohydrates specific to that patient to regulate levels.

"It may seem like common sense," Bergstrom said. "But people rarely know exactly how much they need to consume."

TRYING TO BUILD ON SUCCESS

Published trials of BlueStar have already shown that the real-time patient coaching and clinical decision support for physicians the app offers is working, Bergstrom said. The app demonstrated an average two-point drop in the A1C test, which measures the amount of hemoglobin coated with sugar.

Higher A1C levels reflect poorer blood sugar control and a greater risk for diabetes complications, according to the Mayo Clinic.

"Every one-point A1C reduction has been shown to reduce diabetes complications by up to 40%," Bergstrom said.

The team had believed that the typical client would be those who, though suffering from chronic illnesses, were still greatly invested in their health. Instead, they found the app resonating with the average American who needs a regular nudge toward a healthy lifestyle.

"It's kind of like a conscience," said Wanda Jackson-Houston, a 57-year-old Baltimore resident who has been using the app since June. She says she has noticed a discernible improvement in her health. "It makes you more aware of what's going on with your body, and the reminders [alerts] help you stay on track."

Jackson-Houston said she struggles to use the product every day, and generally inputs data about three times a week.

"I always feel better when I go back," she said.

When they saw the app resonating beyond their original demo, "We realized we had a very scalable product for the everyman," Bergstrom said. "This is treatment for the masses."

The medical information is protected through military-grade data encryption technologies, developed in part with the Air Force.

Sysko said WellDoc's focus right now is on diabetes treatment, but the long-term plan is to expand for management of other diseases.

"We've developed our platform with the underlying technology that could work with most chronic illnesses," he said. They also hope to expand from the Mid-Atlantic region to a nationwide rollout in the next 12 months. "Here we are with a software product that can change health care in a significant way," says Sysko.

Dr. Peter Pronovost, a senior vice president of patient safety and quality for Johns Hopkins Medicine, said WellDoc's business model is a prime example of the direction health care is headed. He supports the movement because it encourages patients to be more mindful of their health, which in turn increases life-span, as most deaths currently could have been preventable.

"We will see an explosion of apps," he said. "I hear pitches for several every week."

Pronovost said BlueStar is innovative in that it considers treatments on an individual level, rather than the common practice of going by a solution for the masses.

"Not everyone responds to the therapies the same way," he said.

He said the idea of a prescription act is "intriguing" in that it lends an element of seriousness to the product. (Bergstrom said the FDA gave BlueStar the prescription label because it requires the oversight of a physician.)

But Pronovost said the company might struggle to stand out as health care apps continue to proliferate. "Eventually, it's going to be burdensome for users to keep using all these apps," he said.

[Bottle Image: Tony Marinella Photography via Shutterstock]

[FACEBOOK](#) [TWITTER](#) [SHARE](#)

THE MEDICAL INDUSTRY IS ON A COLLISION COURSE WITH INNOVATION. HEALTHWARE IS ABOUT THE COMPANIES AND PEOPLE WHO ARE GOING TO SHAPE YOUR HEALTH IN THE YEARS AHEAD.

[WORLD CHANGING IDEAS](#) >> [SLICKER CITY](#) | [TERMINAL VELOCITY](#) | [HEALTHWARE](#)

[READ MORE](#)

THE 2014 **SPRINTER**
Starting at **\$37,710**³ 2500 Crew Van 144" Standard Roof, 4-cylinder
[Learn more >](#)
DISCLAIMER
Mercedes-Benz
ADVERTISEMENT

Subscribe to Newsletters

ENTER YOUR EMAIL:

[SUBMIT](#)

MOST CREATIVE PEOPLE

There Is No Such Thing As Pumpkin Spice Latte Season

THE FUTURE OF WORK

Jobs of the Future: Where They Are, How to Get Them

INNOVATION BY DESIGN

6 Questions For Tom Gelsmar, Illustrous Designer Of PBS, Xerox, And Mobil Logos

NET-A-PORTER.COM

Enjoy FREE NEXT-DAY SHIPPING for a limited time only
[SHOP NOW](#)

FAST COMPANY

Microsoft's Surface Pro 3 Is An Impressive Hunk Of Hardware--But Windows Still Needs Work

CO.CREATE

Reebok Brings Shoes To Your Door With Its Human Dispatch Service

THE RECOMMENDER