



Episode 1: Entrepreneurship at Lumina – Dr Jon Field

Rebecca Griffin (host):

This is a podcast by Lumina, the perfect space to innovate, collaborate, and grow in health, science and technology.

Rebecca Griffin (host):

Dr. Jon Field, welcome to Health Tech Talks.

Dr. Jon Field:

Thanks very much for having me.

Rebecca Griffin (host):

Jon, you're a busy intensive care specialist in the ICU at Gold Coast University Hospital. But when you go home from a shift, you don't just put your feet up. You turn your attention to your other role as CEO of Docto, Australia's online hospital. And it's through this work that you've been described as a medical revolutionizing the health industry. Jon, I'm totally intrigued by the idea of an online hospital. How does Docto work?

Dr. Jon Field:

Well, I am a medical specialist and I have been working in a hospital environment my entire professional life and myself and my colleagues had the notion that we would create a telehealth version of what we do in our terrestrial lives, if you like. The idea sprouted back in 2014, when Tim Haraway and Andrew Jones and I were working in the travel insurance industry. And with that, we were often asked to talk to patients overseas, expatriates, tourists who needed medical advice. We were struck by how cumbersome and difficult that was to arrange. So we set out to build a mechanism of connecting ourselves as medical specialists with Australian travelers and expatriates. We develop the concept of an online hospital where we have a 24 hour virtual emergency department staff by emergency physicians and medical specialists, outpatients, if you like where we create a telehealth appointment with a cohort of medical specialists who were eager to be involved at the outset. And since then, the cohort of the team has grown. And now we have launched a network of specialists who are involved. It really is an online virtual telehealth hospital.

Rebecca Griffin (host):

So from idea to launch, Jon, how long was that?

Dr. Jon Field:

Well, we set about it in 2014. 2015 was largely development. I think we got our first customer towards the end of 2015 at the travel insurance company who took us on, which was a fantastic boost. And we were able to develop things from there.

Rebecca Griffin (host):



Can you talk us through, Jon, the process to set Docto up?

Dr. Jon Field:

Well, to start with, a bunch of us just chucked in some money. It was about six of us, all medical specialists and urologists, urologists, infectious disease, ICU, and emergency medicine. We all put in a bit of money and we set about trying to create a tech platform to do it on. And at that stage, 2015, the options for video and audio APIs embedded in a web application were much more limited than they are now. So that was a challenge in itself, finding a developer or development team who could help us create something. We battled a bit with that and I have to say, we had a couple of false starts, but we were operational. What we simply did was continue to build the platform around what our needs were, our practical functional needs. And as we got busier and the scope got broader, we layered in extra things. We had to rebuild it a couple of times, but now we've got a solid tech development team in house who've been with us really for a number of years now and the project's going really well. It's really exciting.

Rebecca Griffin (host):

So you mentioned there about your in-house tech team. What technology do you use?

Dr. Jon Field:

Well, it's all proprietary software, so we've developed our own platform. Everything in there is hard coded from the ground up, and we've built it. We created it, as I say, to be able to do what we do, to consult online. Booking system, database patients and doctors, consulting rooms, of course, with real time video, audio file sharing, et cetera. Electronic medical record, et cetera, et cetera, and all little extras that go into trying to connect people in a timely fashion. Reminders and SMSs and that sort of thing. So it's been a very interesting journey.

Rebecca Griffin (host):

What about patient privacy online, Jon? Can patients be confident their information is safe?

Dr. Jon Field:

Absolutely. It's something we're very conscious of and that's been part of the challenge is locking it down sufficiently, but at the same time, making it easy to use. And that's the balance with all these things.

Rebecca Griffin (host):

Aside from that, Jon, what's been your biggest challenge?

Dr. Jon Field:

Gee, there's been plenty of challenges. Look, I think early on it was the tech. We had three rebuilds because I have to say that when it comes to tech, I mean, I was a complete novice and it was hard to know what to look for. And everybody you asked in the tech industry, software developers, they all say, "Yes, I can do it." And you don't know that they can't until you've spent 50 grand. And that was a challenge and somewhat frustrating.



Dr. Jon Field:

And laterally, I would say the challenges are around, well, obviously customers. Corporate customers in particular. That's a big boost if you can get a corporate customer, but getting patients through the door and getting the word out to them with digital marketing, which again, I have to say that the whole SEO, SEM, dark art, which you'll know all about. It's less of a dark art for me now. I'm a bit more savvy about it, but again, a couple of false starts there and you don't know until you've put money down that funnel, the SEO funnel until you know what works and what doesn't. So that's been a challenge.

Dr. Jon Field:

But it's getting people to... It's hearts and minds to a degree. And particularly early on in the first few years where telehealth was very new, it's much easier in many ways since COVID because telehealth has become suddenly accepted in mainstream. But it was certainly for the first few years, it was winning hearts and minds. I have to say the doctors were the sticking points many times because it was so new to them. The patients just loved it. If you're an expat in Singapore or you live out in rural WA, they couldn't believe how wonderful it was to be connected to an orthopedic surgeon or a cardiologist or a neurologist on the end of the phone or on the laptop. And they just thought it was wonderful. But getting the doctors on board was a little bit harder, not just because of the concept, but because the good ones are busy.

Rebecca Griffin (host):

And Jon, speaking of doctors, what specialties do you have available online now?

Dr. Jon Field:

Well, we have done consultations in 32 specialties. So we've got referral pathways for all the mainstream and many of the less known specialties. What's nice is that because we've got so many miles on the clock now, we are able to match referrals we get with the best specialist within that specialty, both from expertise point of view, but also accessibility. Costs comes into it. We pretty much have done them all now and the most popular ones would be recently psychiatry, dermatology, neurology, and pediatrics.

Rebecca Griffin (host):

I'm intrigued about how an emergency consult can happen. Usually if someone's needing that acute care, they'd come into an emergency department. How does an emergency consult work?

Dr. Jon Field:

Well, you can go to our site and press the button and you enter your details and the doctor pops up. We do them in real time, the emergency ones, because we've modeled it like an emergency department where you don't need an appointment. Just walk up and you're seen when possible. I use early as possible. And we've got a little tiered system. There's usually two doctors, sometimes more consulting. Depending on demand at the time. And after you click the button, the consult ensues, and that's the way it works.

Rebecca Griffin (host):

They may get to a point where they have to say you actually need to go into an emergency department.



Dr. Jon Field:

Yes, absolutely. There are some cases where we can't add value or that the patient needs a face to face consultation. We'll facilitate that and refer them on as needed.

Rebecca Griffin (host):

One of the areas I see that you would be adding massive value is giving patients the opportunity to see a specialist sooner. Is that the case?

Dr. Jon Field:

Yes, absolutely. And that's really our main point of difference, I think, as a telehealth service is our cohort of specialists. And we're a medical specialist telehealth service. We've got no desire to be a general practice one. There's plenty that are well serviced by some great providers. We want to do medical specialists. This is what excites us most and interests us most and what we set out to do originally. Particularly, in this last couple of years where we've launched a project to support rural GPs in Queensland who may not feel they have adequate access to specialists for their patients and who may not have either established referral pathways or accessible specialists at the end of them who can see their patients in a timely fashion. So the project we're working on at the moment is specifically rural Queensland to try and get patients through to see their specialists as quickly as possible.

Rebecca Griffin (host):

Are you finding that most of the people reaching out to you for the service are expats and regional rural people, or are you getting people from everywhere now?

Dr. Jon Field:

Not expats these days. It's rural is our main clientele. There's a community in far north WA who've been using us for a long time. More recently, rural Queensland for the specialists on the end of the campaign that we're currently running. And as I say, we cover all medical specialties and some particularly lend themselves well to telehealth.

Rebecca Griffin (host):

Jon, what's your vision with Docto?

Dr. Jon Field:

Well, what we're trying to do is establish a referral hub, as I say, for the GPs in rural Australia who have difficulty accessing advice and specialist treatment for their patients. So we want to become a hub where we can get patients referred in and referred out to the specialists. And of course, we host and coordinate the consultations on our platform and we want to build our network and be a national provider, which we are. But of course, there's much more to do.

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Rebecca Griffin (host):

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Rebecca Griffin (host):

Jon, how do you think Lumina can help others looking to start a business in the health tech sector to develop and grow?

Dr. Jon Field:

Well, can you bring customers? Customers is what we all need. There's so many things. There's so many links in the chain. Getting reliable tech development, I think. Connecting startups with developers who can actually do what they say they can do. Easy access to advice on SEO and SEM where there's not a vested interest in making you spend money that's not going to help. Marketing in general. But connecting entrepreneurs with the markets that they want to tap into. And that's the ultimate thing is if you can get your MVP up and running and then bring some business through the door that, you're away then, and anything you can do to connect those dots up is going to be hugely helpful.

Rebecca Griffin (host):

So Jon, it's really about collaboration and linkages to people who really do know what they're talking about.

Dr. Jon Field:

Yes. And all those things which you don't know about to start with that are going to come, particularly when it comes to things like digital marketing, SEO, trademarks, and IP, all those things that you learn as you go. I mean, I've been very lucky because we just have such a fantastic core team. And I have lots of friends who are extremely smart in the business world that I can lean on and ask them questions. So I'm really lucky. I've got a great team at Docto. You've just got to be able to ask people for the advice you need and to point you in the right direction, and having access to that expertise is usually important.

Rebecca Griffin (host):

If you could go back to 2014, '15, and start again, what would you do differently?

Dr. Jon Field:

If I'd known how much work it was going to be, I don't know if I'd have been parked on it. I'm so glad I did though because it's just been an amazing journey and one I'm looking forward to continuing. Look, I mean, you've got to have some wins and losses and it'd be great in many ways to tiptoe around the losses. And when I say losses, I mean, things like false starts with tech and making a tech development where it doesn't work out quite and you've got to go back to square one. But you learn from those mistakes. I don't have any regrets really. I'm looking forward to the next stage.



Rebecca Griffin (host):

And Jon, what key messages do you have for entrepreneurs with an idea they believe could transform or support healthcare?

Dr. Jon Field:

Well look, firstly, if the idea is a unique one, you'll just have to discuss and tease out the niche that you want to develop. If it's one that's already being done to death and since COVID came, there are an awful lot of tech health startups with providers. So make sure the idea has a unique value proposition. Surround yourself by good people. And if you can get some funding or put your own money in, which is inevitably what you'll have to do to start with, get it off the ground and have a crack. And at the end of the day, you're just going to have to have a crack because you can't completely predict what's going to happen and you're going to have to test it.

Rebecca Griffin (host):

Do you think it's important, Jon, to be doing something in your own field? So you've done this in health, which you know well. Could you do something completely outside of your field with the right support?

Dr. Jon Field:

Well, I think you have to know what you're doing. You've got to have an idea about where you're headed. Otherwise you're going to fall by the wayside. I think so. I mean, we've been hugely lucky. The doctors that are providing the telehealth in Docto are the doctors that I work with in my terrestrial practice and the business advice that I can get are friends and colleagues from other walks of life. I've just been very lucky with all that stuff.

Rebecca Griffin (host):

Jon, how do you fit it all in? You work in the ICU, your CEO of Docto, you have a family. How do you manage it all?

Dr. Jon Field:

With difficulty. It's a bit of a juggle. The Docto side of things is we're forever trying to automate and streamline things. And that's one of the nice things about tech is that you are always looking for a little way of streamlining and automating the process. So yeah, it's a forever juggle and it's an ongoing rebalance and that process, no doubt, will continue.

Rebecca Griffin (host):

So in summary, Jon, if you have an idea, surround yourself with like-minded people, find your team, ask for help and don't give up. Would that be a fair summary?

Dr. Jon Field:

Yes. Yes. At the end of the day though, you're going to make some mistakes, but that's the only way forward and have a crack and test it.

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Rebecca Griffin (host):

Jon, thank you so much for chatting with Health Tech Talks today. It's been fantastic and all the very best with Docto. I can't wait to catch up in another six years' time and see where things are at.

Dr. Jon Field:

Fantastic. Thanks for having me.

Rebecca Griffin (host):

If you'd like to find out more about Docto, visit www.docto.com.au. That's D-O-C-T-O.com.au. To learn more about Lumina and how we work with health tech startups, visit Luminagoldcoast.com.au. And don't forget to sign up to receive your Lumina opportunities pack today.