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IDEAS IN ACTION

Health care on the go

FRONTERA'S MOBILE TESTS ARE A SPEEDY OPTION FOR PATIENTS AND DOCTORS

BY AMBER JONES | STAFF WRITER

Irving-based Frontera, a mobile diagnostic testing company, is making it easier for doctors to quickly give patients tests they need.

Frontera offers an array of services and diagnostic tests — echocardiograms, venous scans, neurological tests, pulmonary function tests and cardiopulmonary metabolic exercise stress testing — that allow patients to become more proactive with their health care.

“Frontera is a service,” said founder Richard Baker. “Basically we will find a physician that’s interested in using our services. We send a technician out there with our equipment, and all the physician has to do is provide a room and the patient.”

Baker, Nate Nelson and Ches Williams founded Frontera in 2001.

Their background was in technology during the dot-com reign, but after the Internet bubble popped, the partners began searching for a new business opportunity. The prospect was health care.

“We stumbled across these companies performing these portable medical tests for physicians in the Houston area, and quickly decided we liked health care,” Williams said. “We loved their concept, we just didn’t jell with the people that had the business. So we decided to talk with as many doctors and specialists to build our business and hire someone to help build the company piece by piece.”

Finding funding to get off the ground presented a challenge. Because of the team’s lack of health care experience, banks didn’t want to take the risk. The founders went months without a paycheck, but persistence eventually paid off.

Through word of mouth, the team heard that Chase Bank was a preferred lender for small businesses. At first, the bank turned them down like everyone else, until they finally requested to speak to one of the top executives of Chase who was based in New York, N.Y. After the meeting, a check was signed and Frontera was born.

Frontera has conducted more than 100,000 tests, with close to 2,000 physicians across Texas and Oklahoma. It anticipates growing 25 percent in 2013.

Frontera is able to submit results two to three business days after a patient’s tests are taken, which can be critical if someone has a severe problem. Expert technicians provide a review of the results, allowing primary care doctors to make appropriate medical decisions.

Dr. Lisa Medwedeff of Plano-based Village Medical Center, said that bringing the service to the patient has



GETTING FINANCIALLY HEALTHY: Ches Williams, Nate Nelson and Richard Baker went months without a paycheck when they founded Frontera in 2001. Banks were reluctant to take a risk on their company.

“We empower physicians to bring in specialized testing to take better care of their patients in their office, as opposed to having to always refer them out to different specialists. It’s more convenient for patients, helps doctors ensure their patients are being more compliant and makes a practice more financially secure.”

Ches Williams

Frontera

encouraged more patients to get tested.

“I had a patient referred to me because she was complaining of shortness of breath,” Medwedeff said. “She was told to get this done for a long time, but she didn’t want to see another doctor. She had this problem for a long time and I finally set her up to have an echocardiogram. Sure enough, she had progressive heart failure. I was able to make the diagnosis and get her the right treatment.”

Medwedeff praised the ability and skill of Frontera’s technicians, who even burned a CD for patients so that they could take their echocardiogram test results directly to their cardiologists.

“The patient wins and the primary physicians in charge benefit financially, too,” she said.

The Frontera team said they discovered a niche in an industry that will continue to expand.

“We empower physicians to bring in spe-

GREATEST CHALLENGE



“Our biggest challenge was the drop in Medicare. Reimbursement cuts and uncertainty in health care are difficult things to manage,” said founder Ches Williams. “But to overcome this, one thing we have done is usher in a new era of transparency throughout the company. We share all of our financial metrics with our employees so they know that we are all in this together as a company. They know exactly what our goals are and what challenges we are facing. And they can work with us to actively solve some of these challenges that are in our way.”

PUT TO THE TEST

NAME: Frontera

BUSINESS: In-office diagnostics

HEADQUARTERS: 7301 N. State Highway 161, Ste. 100, Irving 75063

OWNERSHIP: Private

FOUNDERS: Richard Baker, Nate Nelson, Ches Williams

EMPLOYEES: 65

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cialized testing to take better care of their patients in their office, as opposed to having to always refer them out to different specialists,” said Williams. “It’s more convenient for patients, helps doctors ensure their patients are being more compliant and makes a practice more financially secure by doing more things in their office. At the end of the day, we feel as if we are saving clients’ lives by helping doctors identify illness and disease in a much earlier stage before it becomes catastrophic.”