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## PharmaPod's Leonora O'Brien takes on \$42bn global challenge

### Podcast ep 31: [PharmaPod](#) founder Leonora O'Brien is building a global software company on the principle of reducing medication errors for patients.

A pharmacist with more than 25 years in the profession, PharmaPod founder Leonora O'Brien always believed there had to be a better way when it came to medication errors.

Her first perspective was that it wasn't just confined to any one country, errors were consistent globally.

Her second perspective was that even the smallest percentage of error could be life-threatening in many cases.

"While I was a European manager for a corporate pharmacy group based in Germany, overseeing eight countries, I just saw that medication errors were happening all the time. Pharmacists do an amazingly great job at keeping patients safe despite the huge amount of dispensing that happens.

"But I realised that errors were consistent across all countries. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has a global patient safety challenge to reduce medication errors by 50pc over the next five years."

### Tackling the \$42bn per year cost of medical mistakes

ThinkBusiness.ie · Episode 31 - Leonora O'Brien

Across the world, medical mistakes can cost as much as \$42bn globally a year, according to the WHO.

And so, O'Brien's Dublin-headquartered business PharmaPod is very much front and centre in this fight to ensure a reduction in medication errors.

Founded in 2012, PharmaPod has developed a secure cloud-based application that enables pharmacists to record and share medication-related incidents.

The company is on the cusp of closing a €3.5m funding round and has appointed Andy Donoghue, former CEO of KM Medical as its managing director.

“While I was working in a regulatory role I realised that most of the errors are preventable and felt it was incumbent upon me to just try to come up with a solution to reduce medication errors in pharmacy practice,” O’Brien explained

This conviction led O’Brien to step away from a safe career trajectory and become an entrepreneur. “I pitched my idea to the NDRC for their accelerator programme, which was a fantastic experience, and it went from there.”

The company has been going from strength to strength since closing a €1.94m funding round in 2018.

“And so we have developed a cloud-based software for pharmacies and hospitals, we cater for the whole healthcare sector and you can go on to the system to do a record review, analyse all the issues that are occurring in your organisation and at the click of a button know what the risks to the patients are. It’s all to do with continuous quality improvement and being able to demonstrate how you’re improving your professional practice over time.”

O’Brien followed a global vision from the start. “We needed to be multilingual. We needed to be highly scalable so that we could take on any number of pharmacies overnight.”

The business has been successfully launched in Ireland, the UK and Canada and is currently launching into the US. “60pc of the pharmacies in Canada, for example, are using the PharmaPod solution, and are customers are from your independent pharmacies to regulators of pharmacies and also the long-term care sector, nursing homes and also to hospitals.”

As O’Brien emphasises, it all boils down to creating a platform that enables continuous quality improvement. “You can’t improve what you can’t measure first and in order to make decisions in an organisation you need to be able to have the data to hand and identify what are the errors that are occurring.”

Returning to her decision to step away from a set career path to entrepreneurship she recalls: “It was at the tail-end of the last recession and everybody was making sure they kept their jobs and I took a leap of faith because I felt this was a problem that needed to be solved. You don’t really learn in a safe environment. I think it is when you start to take risks that you really start to make things happen. And that’s where the learning occurs, stepping outside of your comfort zone is where the most learning happens. Even now, on a daily basis we are trying to challenge ourselves to do something new.”

O’Brien believes good entrepreneurs are driven by problem-solving.

“I’m always comfortable in the unknown. I’ve never really been risk averse. I’ve always just followed my heart and I think an awful lot of entrepreneurs are like that. They’re just driven by trying to solve a problem. That’s what innately gets them up in the morning.”

This desire to solve the medication error problem is what drives her team. “They’re passionate about solving the problem. Especially when it comes to the safety of patients and having seen the harm that is caused.”

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Published: 24 September, 2020