Startup pushing software system for changing health behaviors

August 1 2018, by Christopher Snowbeck, Star Tribune (Minneapolis)

Credit: CC0 Public Domain

A Minneapolis-based startup company said it has raised $12 million to complete work on a technology platform that's meant to help patients and their clinicians find the best strategies for changing unhealthy behaviors.

Clinics buy subscriptions to the [software](#) service from Praestan Health, which draws on more than 20 behavior change models to create a personalized "change path" for individual patients.

When crafting plans for individuals, the software is designed to pull data from electronic health record systems in clinics as well as detailed online screening tools that patients fill out online, said Dr. L. Read Sulik, the company's founder and chief medical officer.

"We do believe that we have an ability to know more about an individual—what the individual's problems are, and what the recommended area of focus would be ... than we would from completing six visits with the individual," Sulik said. "Because we're able to gather so much information in a very highly structured and efficient way through our software system."

The money comes from unnamed sources that Sulik described as "angel investors" who are closely following the company's progress. Founded in 2017, Praestan Health has 22 employees and could see a doubling in size over the next 12 to 18 months, Sulik said.

The system is being used by PrimeWest Health, which is a managed care organization in 13 rural Minnesota counties, as well as clinics run by Pipe Trades Services Minnesota. Beyond completing the technology, Praestan Health plans on using the funding to build a national organization.

Before founding Praestan Health, Sulik worked as chief integration officer at PrairieCare, a psychiatric health care system in the Twin Cities, and as senior vice president for behavioral health services at South Dakota-based Sanford Health. Sulik also worked as an assistant commissioner at the Minnesota Department of Health.

By guiding [patients](#) to change health behaviors, the software system promises to help clinics see better patient outcomes while reducing the overall cost of care, Sulik said. Such a software tool will be more valuable to clinics, he said, as health insurers move to "value-based care" contracts that include financial incentives for [health care providers](#) to efficiently provide care.

"As health care providers become more and more involved in at-risk contracts for [health](#) outcomes, by using a system of this sophistication to improve outcomes, they are much more likely to obtain their dollars back," Sulik said via e-mail.