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Caregiver Thought Leader Interview: Peter Havas • June 3, 2016

EDITOR'S PEN

Gary Barg, Editor-in-Chief

Caregiver Thought Leader Interview: Peter Havas

Founder and CEO of PillDrill

Gary Barg: What makes PillDrill what we like to call, Caregiver Friendly?

Peter Havas: A couple of things, first, the physical action that is required to log a medication as taken is simply an extension of the process the pill-taker is already doing. In most cases, they are opening a pill bottle, tipping one pill out into their hand, grabbing a glass of water, taking the pill, putting the cap back on the bottle, and putting it back down.

The only thing that PillDrill requires in order to record that the medication has been taken, is to simply wave that pill bottle in front of the PillDrill hub. If it is a scheduled medication and the time for taking it had come up, then the device itself will have given a reminder to the person who needs to take the pill. The reminder is a series of audio-visual alerts. There is a screen on the device that tells you specifically what you need to take. There is a speaker in the device that emits a tone when it is time to take it, and there is a light-diffuser ring, which we think is an elegant way of capturing attention from a distance in a subtle way.

If you set your alarm clock for 7:00 a.m., it is going to go off whether you are asleep or awake. PillDrill will only remind you if you need to be reminded. It will not remind you to do something that it knows you have already done.

If it keeps reminding you even though you have already taken the scheduled medication, you are going to get quite annoyed and eventually stop using it. These are subtle points of respect we have tried to build into every step of the process.

Then, on the caregiver side, the simple action of waving the pill bottle in front of the device captures the piece of data that has already been associated with that particular medication. Depending upon whether the caregiver has set-up the system to alert them, it will either trigger a real-time notification or not.

We designed PillDrill, in terms of simplicity and ease of use for both the person who is taking the pills and the caregiver who is looking for that piece-of-mind.

Gary Barg: Well, it does look like a handsome and an elegant system.

Peter Havas: Thank you. It is important to us, especially for people who take lots of pills, that the solution looks good. The reason for that is the taking of pills is not a pleasurable exercise; it is a fundamentally negative thing to do. There is this double-whammy, physically you are not quite what you used to be and emotionally—that is weighing on you as well. Then, in the old-world of medication adherence devices, you'd have a clunky, funky-looking device that actually advertises it to the world.

We had people tell us early on that they would hide their old devices when visitors came to the home because they did not want to advertise the fact that they took lots of pills. They would stick it behind the plant in the corner or put it in the kitchen drawer, obviously, it is not doing much good sitting there.

Gary Barg: As with everybody that I know who is supportive of family caregivers, you have a personal story that goes behind your creation of PillDrill.

Peter Havas: Both my parents, I am happy to say, are doing well. A while back, my mother had both her hips replaced within a two-year period. For the first procedure, I flew home to Australia and was part of the cheerleading team. I did not really do anything, but I was glad I was there, and my mother was glad I was there. The year later, when it was time to have her second hip done, we were Skyping, as we often do and she proactively asked me not to come back for the operation. I asked her why and she replied that I should said come at a time that suits me. She said “Your father is here. Your brother is here. I will be fine.”

I had set both my parents up with Fitbit because they want to keep active and I

thought that would be a good way to keep us connected. I noticed on the day of my mother's second hip procedure that she took 42 steps that day. I thought it was great that she is up and walking so quickly and that I can share that in real-time on the other side of the world without her having to do anything that she does not normally do. It occurred to me there are probably other areas of wellness where this concept would apply. I instantly thought that it would be nice to know that my parents are both taking their pills as prescribed and it would be cool if I could see that in real-time. I thought there is a real opportunity here to, frankly, inject some dignity into this whole process and not reinforce the sub-optimal nature of the person taking pills. It actually can be turned into an uplifting process.

Gary Barg: When I saw the Mood Cube, which is a really simple way to communicate how you are feeling—I said okay, these guys get it.

Peter Havas: Exactly, and again it is a subtle but important point. It is not meant to remove the need for communication—what it is really designed to do is allow me to have a non-medical conversation. Rather than calling my dad and always starting the conversation with “Did you take your pills?” or “Tell me how you are feeling”, where I can come across as nagging, and where he gets pissed-off, and then I am pissed-off because he is pissed-off—all leading to a negativity spiral because every conversation begins on a medical topic.

With PillDrill, before I even pick-up the phone, I know that they have taken their pills, and in most cases, I even know that they are doing well. We can have just as many conversations, but they are all positive because we are not mostly talking about medication.

Gary Barg: The Mood Cube reminds them just how much you care about them as people. It is not just about the process of them taking pills.

Peter Havas: Absolutely. I had completely forgotten that the communication cuts both ways. My mother follows my Mood Cubes, as well. She was concerned about me because I had been scanning all sorts of moods, but in fact, all I was really doing was demonstrating the product to a number of different people.

Gary Barg: So how do caregivers get PillDrill.

Peter Havas: PillDrill is available from pilldrill.com. We have a special deal running which includes free shipping to the United States, Canada, and Australia. In time, PillDrill will be widely available through all the traditional retail channels. That will take some time. We are new company and we just want to make sure that we get every step right.

Gary Barg: If I could ask, why did you not just create an app?

Peter Havas: There are two reasons and I will start with the more obvious one. There are a lot of people who do not use apps, like my 81-year-old father in Australia. He will not touch a smartphone let alone an app on a smartphone. I think the slightly more profound answer is because the use of a device in the physical process of taking medication is not a natural thing. As I described a little earlier, the process of taking medication is a very physical one. You pick up a bottle, you take the top off, you pour a pill out, you grab glass of water—if into the middle of that you have to inject first, find phone, pick up phone, unlock phone, start app, press button, press another button, then fix the mistake I just made.

The habit may last a week or even a month, but it is simply not going to stick because it is not a natural part of the process and all of our interviews and early testing indicated that.

Gary Barg: What are your users telling you?

Peter Havas: There was a couple in one of our earliest testing groups, she has a degenerative muscular disease and he was at work all day. She needs to take six different dosages throughout the day. He would call each time and if she wasn't feeling well, she wouldn't answer the phone. Then he would even get more nervous and would sometimes come home. We got them using an early prototype of PillDrill and somewhat humorously, they refused to send it back after the test period was over. We not only let them keep it but we are swapping it out for the newest version. She told me that using PillDrill literally takes one second to which her husband, instantly responded, "And that one second changes my life." For us, those two comments completely validated all of our efforts over the last couple of years.

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