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Vesta Brue & MedSignals®

Innovators in Personal Health Management

This month, when the first smart pillbox for consumers rolls off the assembly line, inventor Vesta Brue will be celebrating in San Antonio. After five years and a \$5-million investment to develop this medication adherence technology, patent-holder Brue and her engineer partner, Jerome Hahn, will have good reason to cheer. The four-drug, portable med-minder that tracks pill usage already has a long waiting list of chronic-disease patients, caregivers and corporate customers.

Brue envisioned MedSignals® in 2002 when AIDS patients had unusually complex pill-dosing regimens, requiring a dozen or more drugs to be taken several times a day. "It was a management challenge for even the healthiest patients," Brue said. She developed the smart pillbox to hold several days' supply of four drugs, to beep and flash when each drug needed to be taken, and to record lid openings in its memory. The devices are placed on cradles that automatically connect to telephone lines and upload recorded lid-opening times to servers daily.

"What this means is that we can sit at a computer in San Antonio and see if Grandmother in California took her pills correctly today," Brue said.



Brue wrote five successful grant applications to National Institutes of Health (NIH) to fund development of MedSignals and its innovative infrastructure.

Besides use with AIDS patients, she won NIH grants to test various models on elders and children with chronic diseases. In each clinical trial, patients who were reminded when and how to take pills showed significantly better adherence than those without the signaling device. "This has huge implications for health care because how well we follow drug regimens makes a sizeable difference in the effectiveness of treatments – and outcomes," Brue said.

The MedSignals device sells for \$199 through several channels. An additional fee of 50 cents a day provides upload service to charts on the patient's secured webpage. Soon, MedSignals will be offered by health plans and payors hoping to avoid catastrophic costs resulting when patients fail to take medications properly. Most of the company's pre-sales, however, are to scientists testing drugs in clinical trials.

Brue is very passionate about MedSignals and believes the system has the potential to help millions of Americans live healthier lives. This Harvard MBA and lifelong entrepreneur is a busy boomer who represents her prototypical customer – someone who intends to comply but forgets at pill time. She wants intuitive technology that lets her set alarms without reading instructions. Plus, she shares her own charts with remote healthcare providers who enjoy peace of mind in knowing she stays true to her company's slogan: The right pill. The right time. Taken properly.

As MedSignals launches this month, its small operations staff on Alamo Plaza is poised to celebrate briefly, then get back to work. Brue's partner in business and in life, Hahn, shares both the glory and workload with the product's launch. As chief technology officer, he leads the team that will transition this exciting new product from the researcher to the consumer. Meanwhile, Brue is already planning the next innovative product in her pipeline.



Inventor Vesta Brue and partner Jerome Hahn, an engineer, display MedSignals, a "smart" pillbox.

MedSignals

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