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CIBA Vision spinoff rolling out vision screening kiosks

Atlanta Business Chronicle - by Erin Moriarty Staff Writer

An Atlanta company wants to make vision screening more accessible and efficient.

SoloHealth LLC is developing a product called EyeSite, a vision-screening kiosk that lets people quickly check their own vision. The concept is similar to the blood-pressure screening machines found in many retailers, but it is more high-tech and interactive.

The kiosk screens the person's vision, provides a customized report and directs the person to see a local eye doctor as needed.

The kiosks, which will be tested in Atlanta next year, will be in high-traffic places such as malls, drugstores and health clubs, said Bart Foster, president of SoloHealth.

The screening is free to consumers. The business model is based on generating revenue from eye-care companies who advertise in the kiosks and doctors who pay to get referrals from the kiosks, Foster said.

Advertisers will be able to provide a very specific message based on the information the users provide about their age, eye-care habits and vision history.

For example, an ad for daily-wear contacts might pop up for a young consumer, while one for presbyopic eye care might be displayed for someone over 40.

"They will be able to deliver ads that are specifically relevant for that consumer," Foster said.

The kiosks are designed to reach people who neglect to get regular vision exams. Research shows many people visit their eye doctor only every three to four years, Foster said.

"It's going after the millions of people who don't know they need vision correction," Foster said.

Foster got the idea for the kiosks while working at Duluth-based CIBA Vision. He said he developed it under the company's wing and eventually got permission to spin it out with CIBA Vision having a seat on the board and providing some startup capital.

SoloHealth then raised its first seed round from friends and family.

The company was selected this month as one of 15 technology companies to participate in the CapVenture program of Georgia Tech's Advanced Technology Development Center.

SoloHealth is raising capital to help refine the business model and test additional prototypes, Foster said.

Piedmont quality

Piedmont Hospital is pushing ahead with new quality initiatives and quality reporting.

Over the next year, the hospital will be publishing more data about clinical outcomes, pricing for certain medical procedures and job satisfaction.

The hospital first began publishing patient satisfaction survey results in August and has continued to expand the quality information on its Web site.

It recently added clinical data to its Web site. Users can view quality reports for the following categories: heart attack, heart failure, pneumonia and surgical infection prevention.

For example, the hospital ranked above state and national averages in treating heart failure and in surgical infection prevention, but it ranked slightly below state and national averages in treating pneumonia, according to the Web site.

The hospital voluntarily published the data.

"We need to be transparent whether we look really good, about the same or a little worse," said Piedmont Hospital spokeswoman Nina Montanaro.

"We feel like it is our civic and community obligation to share the information."

The quality reports, which are available only for Piedmont Hospital, will soon become available for the three other hospitals that are part of Piedmont Healthcare. That data will appear within a couple of months, she said.

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"Our board and our senior leadership have become very interested in being transparent," she said. "It has been kind of a soul-searching process."

Kudos

Dr. Kenneth E. Bernstein, a professor at Emory University School of Medicine, will be awarded the "2007 Basic Research Prize" by the American Heart Association on Nov. 4.

Bernstein is renowned for his discoveries about the links between kidneys, blood pressure and cardiovascular function.

Solvay scholars

Solvay Pharmaceuticals Inc. has awarded scholarships for higher education worth \$280,000 to 100 students with cystic fibrosis.

Since the scholarship program was created 15 years ago, it has given 400 scholarships worth more than \$1.5 million.

One of Solvay's products is a drug called Creon Minimicrospheres, which is used by cystic fibrosis patients.

Raising money

Software provider Anodyne Health Partners Inc. has raised about \$2 million through stock sales, according to a Securities and Exchange Commission filing.

Anodyne, led by CEO Michael Funk, provides physician billing, medical coding and other software.

The company is at 2550 Northwinds Parkway, Suite 175 in Alpharetta.

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