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SmartCamp shines light on healthcare innovation

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Wolf Shlagman of Consult A Doctor presents his startup to judges at IBM SmartCamp and won the competition. His company provides 24/7 access to physicians through video, email, telephone or Internet.

Can South Florida become a high-tech hub of healthcare innovation?

The admittedly partisan crowd of startups, investors, executives and academics who attended IBM SmartCamp last week thinks it's possible.

"What is there not to be excited about? This is the ground zero for healthcare," said Jorge Rico, managing director of MBF Healthcare Partners, who participated in a panel at the event Tuesday held at Florida International University. "From a venture fund perspective you are seeing a lot more interest. It's a great place to invest."

Rico and others cited South Florida's demographics, particularly its senior citizen and Medicaid populations, its universities, hospital networks, growing investment community and healthcare companies already operating here as key attractions. That's also one reason why IBM chose Miami to host SmartCamp, aimed at fostering innovation and collaboration for developing smarter healthcare technology.

IBM SmartCamps are competitions held in 16 cities around the world, from Bangalore to Sao Paulo, said Mike Riegel, an IBM vice president. At the camp in Miami, five preselected healthcare technology startups presented their companies in front of a panel of judges and the audience at the event.

A Miami startup and one all the way from Hong Kong were the winners and will go on to compete in the national competition in Boston next month.

Miami-based Consult A Doctor, presented by founder and CEO Wolf Shlagman, was the grand prize winner of the evening. Consult A Doctor is a service delivery platform that offers groups, health plans, hospitals and providers with 24/7 access to physicians across the U.S. via telephone, secure email, video and particularly mobile applications. "It's the Intel Inside of healthcare," Shlagman said.

Shlagman believes that in the near future 24/7 access to care will be commonplace. "It's a very exciting time for Consult A Doctor. The marketplace is awakening to the solution," said Shlagman, who is on a road show for additional investor capital now.

The award for the best emerging opportunity went to eNano Health Limited of Hong Kong. Presented by Winnie Leung, co-founder and CEO, eNano is developing a series of affordable medical device products that can be used for health screening at home with instantaneous results for a variety of disease diagnostics, including diabetes. Because the solution uses saliva rather than blood, judges called it potentially game changing.

Leung, who was returning to Hong Kong the next day, explained that she and her husband and their large development team are working around the clock on their solution and she hopes to have the device on the market within a year.

Other presenters were South Florida companies Cohealo, which offers an efficient and cost effective way for hospitals to share medical equipment and is led by University of Miami MBA student Mark Slaughter, and Emergency Medical Technologies, which has developed a wristwatch that monitors the wearer's health for cardiac arrest and other conditions and is led by Bernard Klocman. Also presenting: Cara Health of Chicago, which detects health trends by using language algorithms on patient phone calls.

Today's healthcare challenges offer an enormous opportunity to attack the three biggest problems in the U.S. system: Quality of care, access to care and spiraling cost, Riegel said, noting that all the presenting companies' solutions target at least one of these areas. "We need a whole range of innovation."

Nancy Staisey, another IBM vice president, talked about how the world is entering a whole new era in computer intelligence — big data.

Consider these stats: Data is growing at 35 percent a year and 90 percent of the world's data today was created in the last two years alone. Within the next two year, IBM says, one third of the data will be downloadable.

"The time is right for this," Staisey said. "With healthcare, with the Internet and with the number of medical devices we have, we have a real explosion of information, more than any doctor can use. What we can do with smart systems can be as revolutionary as the X-Ray was for looking into the human body."