

MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH

A cooperative program by

JOHNS HOPKINS BLOOMBERG SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
&
IIHMR University

Practicum at

HealthUnlocked
London, UK

By

Amrutha Anand

Roll no. IIHMR-JHU/MPH/2014-16/2-12

MPH 2014-16
IIHMR/ JHSPH

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Practicum

At

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Report titled

Impact of Online Peer Support- analysis of HealthUnlocked's
impact on its users

By

Amrutha Anand

Under the guidance of

Dr. Matt Jameson Evans

Co-Founder, Chief Medical Officer & Director- HealthCare
HealthUnlocked, London, UK

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MPH 2014-2016

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TO WHOMSOEVER IT MAY CONCERN

*This is to certify that Amrutha Anand, student of **Master of Public Health** program offered by Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore, US in cooperation with the Institute of Health Management Research University, Jaipur, India has undergone Practicum Training at HealthUnlocked, London, UK from 24-Nov-2015 to 29-Feb-2016.*

This practicum training is in fulfilment of the course requirements towards the MPH program.

I wish her all success in all her future endeavours.

Dr. Ashok Kaushik
Dean- Academic & Student Affairs
IIHMR University
Jaipur

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The graduate student has successfully carried out the training and fulfilled the tasks designated to her during the practicum training and her work has exceeded satisfaction.

This practicum training is in fulfilment of the course requirements towards the MPH program.

I wish her all success in all her future endeavours.



Dr. Matt Jameson Evans
CMO & Director-Healthcare
HealthUnlocked
London, UK

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CERTIFICATE BY SCHOLAR

This is to certify that the practicum report titled **“Impact of Online Peer Support- Analysis of HealthUnlocked’s impact on its Users”** for award of **Master of Public Health** embodies my original work and has not formed the basis for award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowships, titles in this or any other institute or other similar institutions of higher learning. The report outlines my training at **HealthUnlocked, London, UK** during the period from **24-Nov-2015 to 29-Feb-2016.**



Amrutha Anand

MPH 2014-16

Roll no. IIHMR-JHU/MPH/2014-16/2-12

Acknowledgement

Firstly, I would like to thank the two founders of HealthUnlocked- Dr. Matt Jameson Evans (CMO) and Jorge Armanet (CEO) for giving me the opportunity to complete my practicum training at HealthUnlocked, London. I also extend my gratitude to Phil Golz (Commercial Director), without whose support I would not have been able to connect to HealthUnlocked and do some incredible work in the health technology area. Dr. Matt Jameson Evans has been an exceptional mentor- introducing me to different ideas and letting me explore them myself, always available to provide his insight and helping me overcome small hiccups in any of the tasks. Adding to my experience at HealthUnlocked are all my colleagues who made the 3 months seem like a vacation. Simone Pemp Pereira deserves special mention for all the help she has extended during my practicum. Overall, the work environment at HealthUnlocked was unique, with everyone supporting each other and inspiring others to contribute to the company.

I am deeply indebted to my husband Manu Ravishankar for being my pillar and standing by me in every endeavour. His enthusiasm and excitement about my work made it easy for me to give it more than a hundred percent.

Lastly, I would like to thank all my professors- both at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and IIHMR University- for introducing a whole new world to me and for setting me up for an exciting career ahead; my colleagues from MPH 2014-16 for providing a positive learning environment and my parents for always being there for me.

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	1
BACKGROUND TO HEALTHUNLOCKED	3
SERVICES OFFERED	3
SUMMARY OF PROJECT	4
OBJECTIVES OF PROJECT	5
STUDY DESIGN	5
COLLABORATIONS	5
ACTIVITIES PERFORMED DURING PRACTICUM	6
1. LEAD FOR IMPACT EVALUATION PROJECT AT HEALTHUNLOCKED	6
2. DAY TO DAY ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT OF RESEARCH PARTNERS.	6
3. INTERACT AND WORK CLOSELY WITH PRODUCT, COMMERCIAL AND TECHNOLOGY TEAM AT HEALTHUNLOCKED TO ENSURE IN-PLATFORM RESEARCH WORK IS CONSISTENT WITH PRODUCT PIPELINE PRIORITIES.	6
4. ACT IN BROADER RESEARCH CAPABILITY WITHIN CLINICAL FUNCTION OF HEALTHUNLOCKED	6
COMPETENCIES DEVELOPED & GAINED	6
OVERALL PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE	7
REFERENCES	8

Background to HealthUnlocked

By the year 2050, the world's population of people aged 65 years and above is set to reach 1.5 billion, representing a sizeable 16% of the world's population, and thus forcing the global healthcare expenditure to rise by 5% per annum to meet the growing demands in the traditional healthcare system(1). However, this is not a sustainable solution to making and keeping populations healthy. The rising costs of healthcare will cripple a huge proportion of people from availing the services offered by the formal healthcare system, leading them to manage their own health needs and decisions. This is the problem HealthUnlocked is trying to solve.

HealthUnlocked's vision is to provide all the tools for people to connect with others in order to navigate and manage their health whilst facilitating a much more effective service from healthcare professionals. Like Facebook and LinkedIn, HealthUnlocked is a social platform business which focuses on people navigating their health needs by connecting with others. Established in 2010, HealthUnlocked is now the world's largest social network for health with more than 380,000 registered users and nearly 4 million visits each month from across the globe. It is also the world's first multilingual peer-to-peer support platform, with communities supported in English, Spanish and Portuguese.

Connecting with other people in one of more than 600 online communities helps users to better manage their health by gaining access to relevant health information, trusted advice and peer support. All communities are formed in collaboration with established patient organizations, moderated by experts and cover a huge variety of health topics from cancer to running and everything in between.

Services offered

- **Community Builder**
HealthUnlocked supports healthcare organisations and patient advocacy groups to 'go social' by setting up communities on the platform, catering to people with varying health conditions and concerns around the world. These communities grow rapidly due to HealthUnlocked's broad web visibility and is rich in information and support.
- **Insight Generator**
A key feature of HealthUnlocked is the opportunity it creates for customers- research organisations or academic institutions- to access a global audience of diverse, highly engaged patients. Both qualitative and quantitative research are carried out directly through the platform.
- **Clinical Research Solutions**
HealthUnlocked works with Pharmaceutical companies, Clinical Research Organisations and with academic institutions to recruit patients for clinical research. The highly targeted approach, which includes digital and telephone screening, has

shown significant reduction in lead times, thereby enhancing efficient and economy of the recruitment process.

- Point of Care solutions

HealthUnlocked has enabled more than 75 hospitals in the UK to electronically capture holistic needs of patients with cancer on their platform eHNA (electronic holistic needs assessment) to frame individual care plans, which is then integrated into the patient's records. This solution has won the NHS Innovation Award and is to be scaled up across the country and across different disease areas.

- Patient Services

HealthUnlocked's core- the Health Graph technology- provides a deeper understanding of each user's needs and helps to match relevant and valuable services and products to the user at the right time in their health journey.

Summary of Project

As an online peer-to-peer support platform, HealthUnlocked strives to engage its users and improve their awareness and build their confidence in managing their health better and has been connecting people around the world to share their concerns and experiences, discuss their health condition and to support each other. Annual user surveys conducted previously showed that 89% of respondents reported to be suffering from ongoing or long-term health conditions and around 85% used the platform mainly for themselves. Nearly 7 in 10 users reported that they did not know anyone with similar health conditions outside of the communities on HealthUnlocked, endorsing the critical role the service plays in bringing similar people together online. Most importantly, more than 90% of the respondents correlated positive influences upon joining HealthUnlocked, ranging from useful to life-changing.

Despite a huge volume of user traffic and pertinent feedback from users about the service, there has been no structured analysis to assess the impact HealthUnlocked has on its users and in the larger frame, there is little evidence on the impact of online peer support available in literature today. This project is an attempt to supplement the user survey results with measurable outcomes which will allow us to assess the impact of HealthUnlocked on its users and their health management.

This project comes at a time when NHS England is advocating involving patients' in their health management through engagement and activation. This proposition has a long history of initiative, campaigns and policies and looking ahead in future, the NHS' Five Year Forward View(2) published in October 2014 emphasizes empowering patients to care for themselves better. This progressive strategy has been supported by the Institute of Public Policy Research, an independent research organization in the UK, which recommends improving access of patients with long-term conditions to peer support, specifically online peer support communities(3).

Objectives of project

This longitudinal observational study is aimed to not only determine if HealthUnlocked is empowering its users to manage their health better, but if it is doing so effectively. The impact of HealthUnlocked will be analyzed on new users, who have not been exposed to the service previously. This project will be scaled up to a cost-effectiveness analysis to highlight the resource implications of HealthUnlocked's service to healthcare payers, insurance companies and other clients. The results of this study is intended to be disseminated through publication in a broad readership journal such as BMJ.

Study design

New users from selected online communities on HealthUnlocked- those that collectively represent broad health conditions- will be chosen to participate in this study. These users will be followed over a period of time to record changes in key outcomes. A custom designed survey questionnaire rendered online will be used to capture the responses of the users, at the time of registration on the platform and at the end of the study period. This survey is composed of validated instruments, each of which focus on one key outcome variable. This survey will capture the users' perceptions on both the service itself and how it has impacted them.

Key outcome variables measured include the activation of the patient, quality of life, healthcare service utilization of the user and user's goals on the platform. The critical and most appropriate measure to assess the impact of HealthUnlocked is the patient activation, which is a measure of the skill, knowledge and confidence of a patient to manage their own health condition. This is captured using the Patient Activation Measure® (PAM®), an instrument licensed by Insignia Health, USA. This tool is a 'gold-standard' to estimate the level of activation of patients in managing their own health, irrespective of their socioeconomic background and the condition they are managing. Being extensively peer-reviewed in the US, this tool has validated positive associations between higher activation levels and better health outcomes, health behavior, medication adherence, patient experience and lower healthcare utilization and costs. This study aims to measure the activation levels of new users at the time of joining HealthUnlocked and after a period of 12 weeks and determine how this change relates to the service usage and the health of users. The user's journey on the platform will also be tracked to understand the online behavior in terms of content creation, user engagement, page view duration, session duration, active duration, frequency and average page depth.

Collaborations

This project will be headed by HealthUnlocked's Research team and will be ably supported by external research stakeholders such as King's Health Economics (from King's College London) (KHE) and Insignia Health, USA. The KHE department will support the project as academic advisors and provide scientific insight and upon completion of the pilot study, will scale up the study to strengthen HealthUnlocked's business case through a Cost-Effectiveness Analysis. Insignia Health, a health consultancy based in Oregon, USA, is the other key research

stakeholder, who have shared their validated tool- PAM®- to be included in this study and will assist HealthUnlocked in assessing the user responses for the 13-questions instrument.

Activities performed during Practicum

1. Lead for impact evaluation project at HealthUnlocked

- i. Conducted background research on concepts including online peer support, evaluation studies previously done, outcome measures used to assess effect of service, etc.
- ii. Designed study methodology for pilot project.
- iii. Liaised with external commercial and academic organizations to establish working relationship.
- iv. Collaborated with HealthUnlocked Product team to set up methods for data collection and user behavior assessment.
- v. Executed and tracked data collection for test study.
- vi. Analyzed results from test phase and disseminated results to research partners and other teams in HealthUnlocked.
- vii. Drafted proposals and MoUs (after test phase) to formally establish working relationship with external research stakeholders, which include Insignia Health and King's College London.
- viii. Aided in scoping suitable grant funding for research collaboration.

2. Day to day account management of research partners.

3. Interact and work closely with Product, Commercial and Technology team at HealthUnlocked to ensure in-platform research work is consistent with product pipeline priorities.

4. Act in broader research capability within clinical function of HealthUnlocked

- i. Point of contact for other research collaborations between HealthUnlocked and academic institutions and research organizations.
- ii. Managing tasks for HealthUnlocked's research work.
- iii. Coordinating with other team leads in HealthUnlocked and track progress of projects.

Competencies developed & gained

I started this practicum experience at HealthUnlocked hoping to apply and strengthen my knowledge and skills from the academic program. However, the 3 months at HealthUnlocked have been exceptional in every aspect, especially in surpassing my learning objectives. I not only got to apply my scientific knowledge and test out my analytical skills, but could work on improving them through rigorous research and rich discussions with my colleagues and external research partners. I have also spent time on learning the basics of big data analysis,

which is a crucial skill in my current position. In addition to this, I have worked on strengthening my communication skills- from drafting research proposals for external collaborators to communicating the aims and objectives of the project to the different teams at HealthUnlocked, from discussing the project and the hypothesis being tested with other research organizations to framing MoUs to establish working relations with stakeholders. I have also had the opportunity and the backing of my preceptor to expand my horizon by being involved in other research activities in the organization, thus honing my project planning skills. Following the practicum, I have been offered a permanent role which gives me a chance to work on improving other essential skills too.

Overall practicum experience

After completing the academic coursework for the MPH program, I was keen to try my hand at using the concepts I learnt in the past year in a real-life working environment. I was fortunate to have not only identified a unique health technology start-up in London working in a niche space, but to have piqued their interest in me with my academic qualifications and my passion. Following an interview and presenting a technical task assignment in London, I was offered the role of a Researcher, to mainly focus on the evaluation project at HealthUnlocked, working directly under the founder and Chief Medical Officer at HealthUnlocked.

My practical experience at HealthUnlocked has been exceptional. Firstly, it has opened a completely different domain in public health to me and convinced me of the power of online peer-to-peer support to disrupt traditional healthcare ideas. Secondly, it has been empowering to be given a sizeable responsibility and enough autonomy to work in a small organization, where I have gone beyond my comfort zone and gained knowledge in other related fields. The chance to collaborate with external stakeholders and communicate both internally and externally about the project has been a valuable experience. I also received strong support from my preceptor on developing additional skills relevant to my experience and to enhance my qualification. Finally, I had the opportunity to explore and design a project and work on it from the first step and was ably supported by my colleagues and other partners.

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