

‘You take a personal risk for the sake of solving a problem to contribute to society’



LEONORA O'BRIEN

Entrepreneur

The European market is flooded with start-up businesses, but the entrepreneur with a truly unique idea and the business acumen to see it through will stand out and thrive. Leonora O'Brien is that entrepreneur. Last year, O'Brien, founder and CEO of Pharmapod, won the Laureate for Europe in the global Cartier Women's Initiative Awards, having been selected as one of 18 Cartier finalists from more than 1,200 applicants. She was one of only three European start-ups shortlisted and the only start-up from Ireland. Founded in 2012, Pharmapod is a simple idea expertly executed, born of O'Brien's 16 years in pharmacy practice. Through a subscription to the Pharmapod cloud-based platform, local and hospital-based pharmacists can record and report adverse drug effects in patients, including the identification of abuse and misuse associated with particular products and record of medication-related incidents and near misses.

O'Brien was working as pharmacy governance and professional development consultant for the Pharmacy Regulator in Ireland when the idea came to her. "You take a personal risk for the sake of solving a problem, to bring your idea to fruition, to contribute positively to society," says O'Brien. She spotted a niche to change the way pharmacies interact with each other and with patients by merging pharmacy and digital. "When you work in the industry you see patterns, such as prescribing errors and patients having adverse reactions to medicines, so I was compelled to set up Pharmapod. You have an idea and you don't really have a choice but to follow it."

By the end of 2014, 400 pharmacies will be using Pharmapod with numbers growing daily thanks to the €5,000 prize fund awarded at the Tech Entrepreneurs workshop in Dublin as part of the European Digital Agenda Assembly in 2013. The product has been welcomed by the pharmacy and health community. Margaret Murphy of the World Health Organisation World Alliance for Patient Safety says, "This requires a level of openness, transparency and honest acknowledgment when shortfalls occur and that's what Pharmapod is all about – sharing information to ensure systems are continually improved, reducing errors and preventing recurrence of avoidable harm." Professor Martin Henman at the School of Pharmacy, Trinity College has said that, "In normal practice it's very easy to see a problem, resolve a problem and move on. But recording the problem in a structured and systematic way means that it can be useful for learning at a later date."

The Pharmapod platform has also revolutionised business for the clients who avail of Pharmapod's monthly subscription. Oonagh O'Hagan, Managing Director of Meagher's Pharmacy Group has noticed marked improvements. "The system has helped us develop a no blame culture in our company, keeping the focus on open communication, learning and improving patient safety." The company was included on Enterprise Ireland High Potential Start-Up (HPSU) programme and Leonora was also a participant on the Going for Growth programme. Now having been named as the Top Digital Health Influencer in Ireland in 2013, O'Brien is keen to show that Pharmapod is no one-trick pony. Recently the business has focused on clinical services and Pharmapod is building a platform which will give pharmacists a standardised

approach to consultation. "We want to engage with as many stakeholders as possible," says O'Brien. "The HSE, the regulators, and the manufacturers." It is clear that Pharmapod has endless potential, and O'Brien's entrepreneurial spirit will reap many future rewards.