

COVID-19: Interview with Dr. Peter Kecskemethy CEO and co-founder of Kheiron

Kheiron specialises in cutting edge deep learning solutions for healthcare and was successful in securing Government funding to accelerate the development of Mia, a breast screening AI solution. A tool that will increase the automation of NHS breast screening services when they start back up again post COVID. Maddyness spoke with Dr. Peter Kecskemethy CEO and co-founder of Kheiron to understand how the company is coping during the COVID-19 pandemic and what the future holds.

Temps de lecture : minute

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[Maddyness] What is the biggest professional challenge for you today?

[Peter] COVID-19 is the black swan of all black swans. Obviously this has caused significant disruption to our business Kheiron, as it has to entire industries around the globe. However, it has also been a time of unprecedented technology adoption in healthcare and there is significant support for the deployment of our AI solution Mia to help process the backlog of mammograms when breast screening services resume. Mia was already being tested as a real-world solution in the NHS before COVID-19 hit so there's more urgency to continue that work and show it is safe for use on any patient in the UK.

What is the biggest personal challenge today?

Working remotely. We are currently conducting a very large-scale trial with our NHS partners - which we think is pretty unprecedented in scale and ambition - to prove the safety of Mia and the lock-down has added significant complexity to completing it. That said, everyone has pulled together internally and with our amazing partners such as EMRAD and we are only delayed by a month or so. Remarkable under the circumstances.

What do you think of the support packages for startups offered by the government? What have you been able to use?

As a UK startup, we're pleased to see that the government has offered support to homegrown companies, and that is true even before COVID-19. This support is instrumental in helping companies like ours grow so we can compete on the global stage with the tech giants out there. During and beyond COVID-19!

We've actually just won a grant from a call that InnovateUK launched last month for technologies that can help post COVID-19. We believe that Mia can help clinicians process the backlog and be a trusted and reliable support for NHS breast screening services. The grant will fund a project to determine the best use of Mia to increase the automation of breast screening services while maintaining patient safety and the standard of care.

Do you feel confident in your business post-

COVID?

Absolutely.

Mia has been under development for a few years now and COVID-19 creates a need to move at an even faster pace. This is what the grant will help us do. Mia was developed on over 3 million images and makes a critical decision in breast screening, whether to recall a woman for further assessment or not - that's because we believe that the combination of AI and humans together gives the best outcomes for patients. Because Mia can make this decision, there is always a human reading mammograms alongside Mia and it means Mia can seamlessly fit into a breast screening service, and add meaningful value post-COVID-19 - it's not just an algorithm.

Our first trial results showed Mia can perform at the same level as a human radiologist but we need to go further. We have to keep patient safety at the centre of developing these solutions so we are also working on a huge study with the NHS right now so Mia can be trusted to work for any woman in any screening service in the UK.

How do you keep your employees happy?

We always bring the whole team together once a week for a Zoom call. It starts with company stuff and then the rest of the time catching up socially as we would do in the office. I'm also always asking for feedback as I want to foster an open culture where everyone feels they can have their say. We have different ways for people to ask the leaders questions so they can do it anonymously if they want. We need to know what's not working so we can fix it! We must have this sort of culture if we are going to deliver our trial and our solution Mia.

As a leader, what do you do to successfully manage your mental resilience amid lockdown?

Getting back to nature - I think it's the best remedy for your mental health. I love nothing more than switching off and going for a hike. And also, being back in my native Hungary, I've found time to connect with friends who are here. That's been really great.

How is your relationship with your investors?

Great. Understanding the complexities and timescales of healthcare is critical for the success of our relationship with the board and it really helps that Irina Haivas, our board member representing Atomico, is a former surgeon and healthcare expert supporting us through these unusual times.

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