



Charu Raheja, Success Story – June 8, 2020

By *Lorrie DeFrank*

“When COVID hit, we were ready,” said Charu Raheja, Ph.D., of the enormous demand on her telemedicine business this spring. “ATHENA helped us move faster when that time came.”

Owner of TriageLogic Group with her pediatrician husband, Ravi Raheja, M.D., she completed the year-long ATHENA PowerLink program offered through the Jacksonville Women’s Business Center that provides expert advisers and mentors selected to meet individual business owner’s needs last year. The timing was perfect to prepare her for the unforeseen coronavirus pandemic that raged soon after.

“It’s been pretty much all COVID the last few months,” said Raheja, whose business has been providing nationwide remote access to nurses to address patient calls and evaluate the next required step for care. She has also helped hospitals set up their own nurses to work remotely and provided them with standardized guidelines to ensure all calls are addressed appropriately.

Even before the COVID-19 crisis forced social distancing and commanded that people stay home, Raheja saw the value of remote patient care in improving access to health care and lowering costs to patients. She has won awards and earned entrepreneurial distinctions for her innovative products and services.

Raised in Brazil, Raheja moved to Jacksonville at age 16, soon embarking on finance degrees—bachelor’s from the University of Florida and master’s and doctorate from New York University’s Leonard N. Stern School of Business. She taught MBA students at Vanderbilt and Wake Forest universities before switching to health care in response to personal experiences.

While still at Vanderbilt, she and her husband founded TriageLogic in 2007 to meet a need for accurate and cost-effective triage services in hospital and private practices. When her father passed away from a massive heart attack in 2009, Raheja’s career focus became enhancing access to health care by using nurses to provide remote patient care. TriageLogic also develops the individualized software to make it all come together 24/7.

Her own medical emergency—a brain bleed while on vacation out of the country in 2014—was the catalyst for her spin-off business, an app for patients to get speedy diagnosis and treatment. Dismissing her pain as a bad headache, she wasn’t treated until returning home more than a week later. “Missing the important signs of a stroke strengthened my vision to provide equal access to high level health care to everyone,” she said.

The app, then called Continuwell, is being rebranded as Smart Touch Connect as part of TriageLogic.

Specially trained registered nurse ambassadors follow standard protocols to provide timely responses to patients, as well as employers, on behalf of health care providers.

TriageLogic Group recently partnered with Baptist Health to set up a COVID-19 hotline and help nurses offer remote triage from their homes. During the pandemic it is working with nonprofits such as Rethreaded to provide free services to employees and survivors of human trafficking. The company serves more than 9,000 physicians and has a combination of about 150 employees and contractors nationwide.

Despite her impressive experience in finance, entrepreneurship and health care, Raheja said she learned a lot from her ATHENA mentors and that the experience greatly affected her team and its outcomes.

“ATHENA holds you accountable. You have to professionalize your company and look at places where you have weaknesses. They help you with that,” she said. “My team loved being able to have something to put together and present.”

Through the guidance of her experienced mentors she said she began to document and measure everything “with more vigor” to determine progress and to better understand values and the viability of moving into new markets. An adjustment she made as a result was to make changes to Continuwell and to fold those services closer to TriageLogic. She gained more confidence in her business skills as well as new friends she can call on for advice indefinitely.

“The ATHENA board went through my accounting and helped me figure out how to put things in the correct bucket,” Raheja said. Her mentors also helped her improve her website, understand her market and the industry better, and decipher challenging government contracts.

“We work hard to find the right team of advisers based upon the business, goals and the entrepreneur herself,” said Ellen Sullivan, director, ATHENA—JWBC. “Charu is an exceptional entrepreneur with a high-growth business on the forefront of health care innovation. She was open to feedback and readily accepted the challenges of her panel. By doing the work and tackling some tough decisions, she made important strides and developed a decision framework to carry forward.”

“Benefits from ATHENA don’t just happen in one year,” Raheja said. “You learn from them and change the way you do business.”

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