

Digital health startup Keriton names new CEO to scale operations

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COURTESY OF RICH MAGER

Rich Mager, the new CEO of Keriton

It's that time for Keriton. The **much-lauded startup** said it's named COO [Rich Mager](#) as chief executive after founder and former CEO [Vidur Bhatnagar](#) — who first developed the company's lactation management platforms for NICUs — stepped down from the role in August.

Mager told the Philadelphia Business Journal Wednesday that Keriton is following a common path for growing startups, as his task now is to scale the foundation Bhatnagar built over the past

two and a half years. During that time, Keriton became a well-known startup in the region, racking up awards and recognition, including at local pitch competitions and national events like SXSW.

While Mager studied computer engineering in school, his expertise is in the business management and development world. Building a sales team and maximizing revenues is where he shines, he said, whereas Bhatnagar was the driving force behind building a dynamic product capable of meeting the sometimes life-or-death needs of NICU babies.

“[Bhatnagar] is a problem solver, a workflow guru and techie. It was always his passion to solve the inherent workflow problem in NICU feeding management, which is how the company was born,” he said.

Bhatnagar and his team began Keriton after participating in the spring 2016 PennApps hackathon competition, where NICU nurses who were on hand to give feedback to participants told them about the struggles in managing breast milk in their unit. Organizing milk as a mother pumps throughout the day,

away from her baby, and making sure it reaches the right baby was a difficult task still logged and monitored by hand. That caught Bhatnagar by surprise.

In the past two years since that competition, Keriton has deployed its HIPAA-compliant platform into two fully functional apps, Kare Mom and Kare Nurse. Kare Nurse allows NICU nurses to keep track of all details about the breast milk they oversee, including the time and date when it was pumped, how long it will last and its location, and make sure it get to the baby. For moms, the app lets them track how much milk they've pumped, engage with nurses and see photos of their baby, which Keriton's data shows increases how much a mom pumps. It's built a secure audio, text and chat tool along with photo sharing to keep moms connected to their babies and the child's nursing team. Real time analytics can track it all, and alert nurses if something is off, like a change in a mom's pumping pattern.

Keriton is addressing a real problem on the market that no one else has solved yet, Mager said, which is why he was first drawn to the company when he first met Bhatnagar in fall 2016, when the then-CEO was closing Keriton's \$1.1 million seed round. After speaking with Bhatnagar over the course of the next 9 months or so, Mager said he was sold.

"I said to myself, 'There's a real need for this, there's a real commercial opportunity for this. It isn't just some neat idea,'" he said. "This is a true problem solver and game changer and no one else is really doing this."

Mager joined as COO a little over a year ago, describing himself as a "complement, [Bhatnagar's] Yin to my Yang."

Mager said Bhatnagar will stay connected with the company as an advisor. Bhatnagar didn't immediately respond to a Philadelphia Business Journal's request for comment Wednesday, but he wrote about his departure and what's next for him in multiple LinkedIn posts.

In an initial departure announcement, he thanked Penn Medicine, his team, investors, advisors, and family and friends "for not just supporting me in this all-consuming endeavor, but for understanding why I was missing from such critical events in their lives."

Now with breathing room, he wrote he plans to make up for that missed time – taking vacation and traveling, catching up on books and writing about his time as a founder in the healthcare IT space. He also wrote he is focused on meeting with people to hash out his next direction — start a company, join a

startup, join a larger firm or finish his Master's degree in robotics at the University of Pennsylvania.

As Bhatnagar explores new paths, Mager said he will lead Keriton on its main focus, supporting its initial customers and, as with any startup at the stage, "sales, sales, sales."

The team has about 10 full-time employees now as well as contractors, and it's looking to grow. More funding may be in the works depending on company revenues and how quickly Keriton would want to close a round, Mager said, but the details are "all to be determined."

Mager previously spent more than 10 years at Accenture focusing on marketing and sales for pharma companies. He got a taste for startup life when he was brought on to a PharmaStar in Wayne and then climbed the leadership ranks of a company that spun out of it, Bracket. He became a senior vice president and general manager of Bracket, helping the company build from 15 employees and \$1 million in revenue to 250 employees worldwide and generating more than \$50 million in revenue. The growth showed Mager what it's like to build a startup from scratch into a heavyhitter, he said. With Keriton, he said, he plans on doing it again.



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