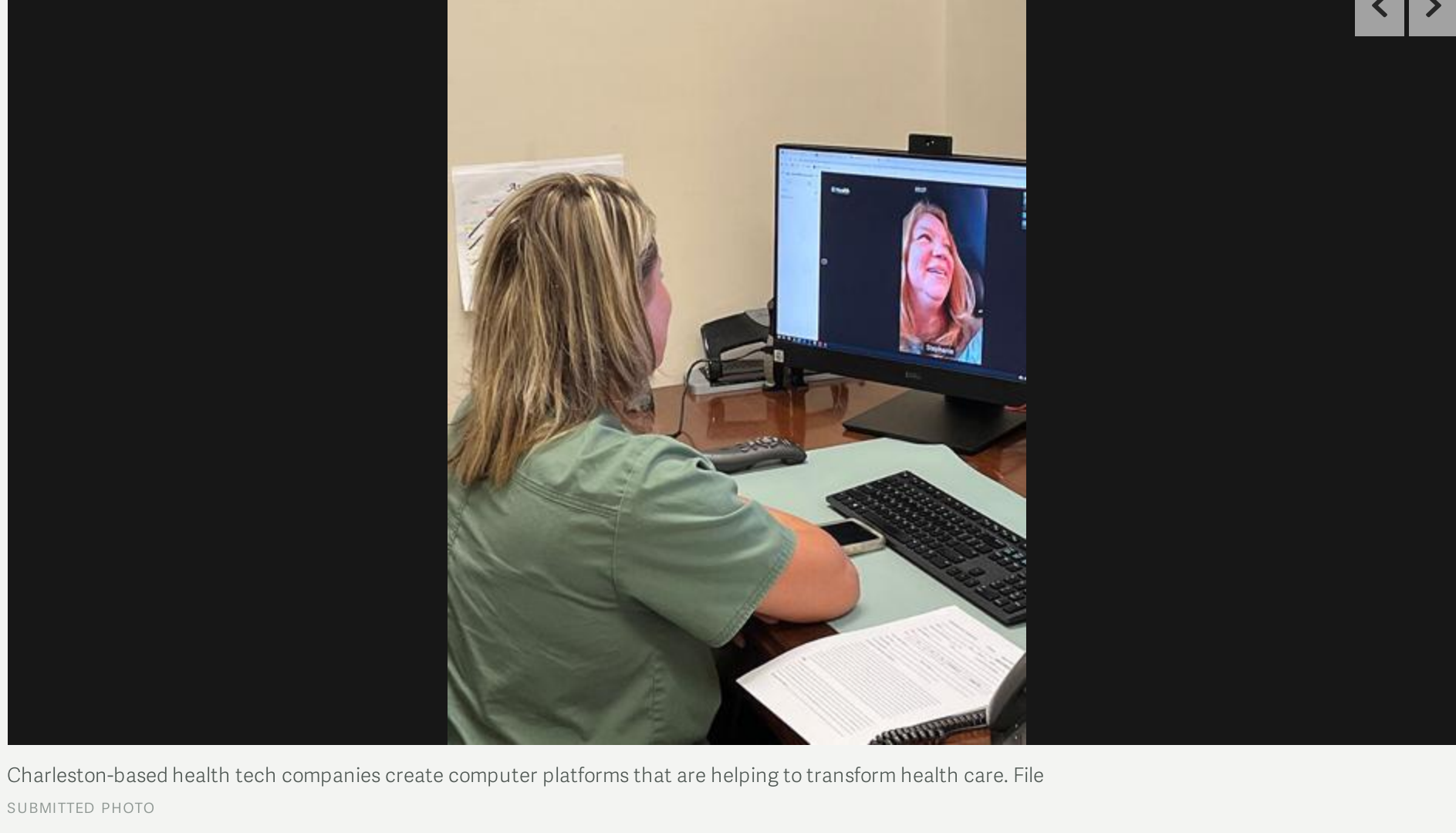
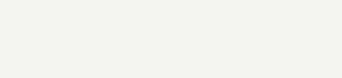


SC health tech companies thrive amid post-COVID pressure to transform health care

BY JODI SHAFTO JSHAFTO@POSTANDCOURIER.COM JUN 6, 2023



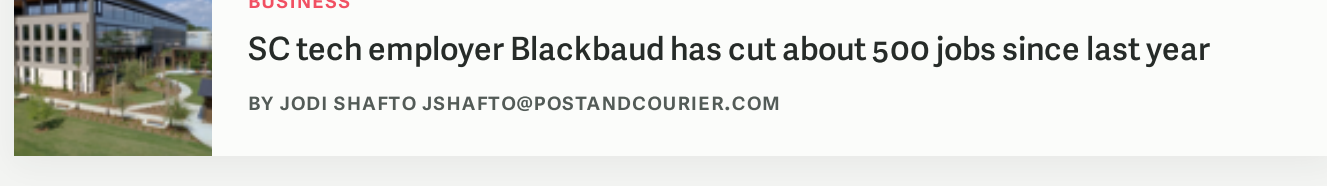
Charleston-based health tech companies create computer platforms that are helping to transform health care. File SUBMITTED PHOTO



Even as leading tech companies have pulled back post-pandemic, laying off tens of thousands of workers, the health care tech sector is proving to be an exception.

The industry continues to grow and morph, with entrepreneurs capitalizing on opportunities that emerged during the coronavirus threat.

Brandon Welch is an example. Welch said he's always been interested in health care and DNA and how to use them to improve people's lives. He went to Tulane University in New Orleans and the University of Utah, studying biology and genetics with a goal to "enhance the quality of human life," he said.



After designing several health information technology systems, the associate professor at the Medical University of South Carolina in 2013 created Doxy.me — a telemedicine business that got its start as a tool for health care providers to bring prenatal care to women who normally would have to travel long distances for well-checks and weigh-ins.

But it wasn't until the pandemic that the platform, described by Welch as "Zoom for doctors," gained traction.

From 2014 to February 2020, subscriptions for the cloud-based telemedicine solution grew from zero to 80,000. At its peak during the pandemic, 980,000 doctor and patient sessions took place in a single day on the free and secure site. Today, 1.2 million providers hold about 300,000 sessions a day on the telehealth platform, Welch said.

Along with the growth came challenges, including extended wait times for patients attempting to connect with doctors. An increase in the number of servers from three to seven and then to 15 resolved the issue.

And then there was staffing.

"We had six employees, three engineers, no human resources department, and a flood of users," Welch said.

Remote operations allowed the company to find workers quickly from around the globe. At the same time,

Charleston, MUSC and the Lowcountry's growing technology sector offered a wide array of professionals to fill positions.

Welch said his staff grew from six to 120, about half in Europe and the rest in various locations around the U.S., including Charleston.

Jonathan Yantis, CEO of QuicksortRx, a health tech company with headquarters in Charleston's Digital Corridor, said the region's quality of life helps attract talent.

"There are easier places to start a tech company, like Silicon Valley," Yantis said, but "Charleston is a great place to live, and the tech community has a lot going on and is really engaged."

Yantis was born into a family of health care leaders and practitioners. He became increasingly aware of the high costs of hospital operations while working as a network architect at MUSC.



Brandon Welch created Doxy.me to help doctors connect with patients online. Provided



The engineering team works at QuicksortRx's offices, located at 997 Morrison Drive, in the Charleston Digital Corridor. Provided

That work led to a partnership with Matt Hebbard and the creation of QuicksortRx, which develops software that helps hospitals save time and money on pharmacy purchases.

An American Health Association study in 2019 showed hospitals spent an average of \$555.40 per adjusted admission between the 2015 and 2018 fiscal years, resulting in an average of \$1.8 million in new prescription drug spending per hospital.

Drug prices continue to rise and "are a serious economic threat to the patients and communities we serve," said the AHA.

QuicksortRx constantly scans market data to help hospitals get better deals on drugs, according to Yantis. He said the application is a one-stop shop where hospitals can check for the best prices, rebates, coupons and other cost-saving mechanisms that can save them billions.

Today, more than 100 hospitals in 21 health care systems use the tool. More than half have joined since the start of this year.

The impressive growth trajectory of health technology companies like Charleston's QuicksortRx and Doxy.me, while other technology companies have struggled since COVID, relates to the much higher pressure to transform health care since COVID.

"Health care has dramatically changed as a result of COVID," said Kenneth Ruggiero, a professor and SmartState chair at the Technology Applications Center for Healthful Lifestyles.

Health care providers have become more comfortable and competent in the delivery of care via telehealth platforms. Patients are also better equipped to engage via these platforms without much confusion, said Ruggiero, who is also the director of the Telehealth Resilience and Recovery Program at MUSC's College of Nursing.

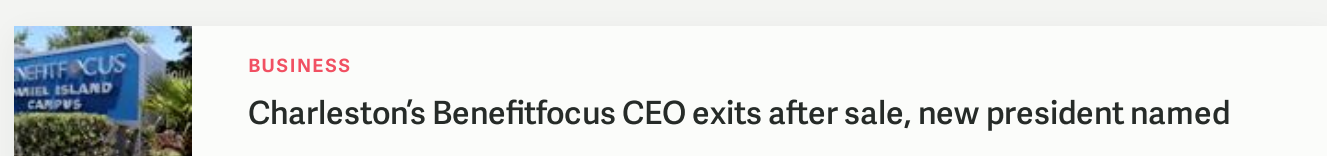
Ruggiero said patients often prefer home-based telehealth over office-based treatment, and science shows telehealth-delivered treatment is just as effective as office-based treatment for many patient populations.

Digital health care is growing and evolving. The global digital health market was valued at about \$195 billion in 2021 and is expected to surpass \$780 billion by 2030.

Health care teams are getting better at identifying risk factors more efficiently using big data, artificial intelligence, and technology.



Jonathan Yantis, co-founded QuicksortRx to help hospitals cut drug costs. Provided



Charleston's Benefitfocus CEO exits after sale, new president named

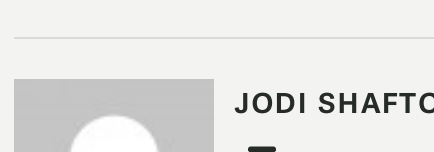
Ruggiero said self-care and symptom self-management apps are growing, and hospitals are learning how to embed these tools effectively in the context of broader health care solutions.

Additionally, technology is increasingly improving the quality of care by providing technology-based learning resources and other tools that keep patients on track with medication regimens and allows them to monitor symptom changes over time.

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