Sick call at home helps lead to UB's High-Tech CEL degree

Richard Nalezynski came back to Buffalo to be a caregiver to his mother — but he didn’t turn off his entrepreneurial instincts.

His subsequent experience dealing with physical therapists and the painful at-home regimens they prescribe to patients led him to develop rehab/neXt, a software suite that tries to liven up the rehab experience while making sure people stay committed.

“We hope it’ll really bridge the gap and make for better care outcomes,” Nalezynski said.

Developing the software wasn’t an issue, but Nalezynski wasn’t as well prepared to deal with the legal issues any startup faces, or the federal compliance issues regarding medical products.

He’s learning a valuable lesson: being a startup in the life sciences and technology industries is no easy task.

Nalezynski was one of 15 local entrepreneurs enrolled in the High-Tech CEL program from the University at Buffalo School of Management’s Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership.

The 10-week course, which concluded recently, was hosted at the Jacobs Institute on the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, and brought experienced speakers from the healthcare and tech industries to speak to participants about everything from fundraising to commercialization.

The entrepreneurs are paired with a mentor, a relationship that’s expected to continue beyond the 10-week course.

“It was an opportunity not only to build skillsets, but to connect with the right kind of people to get off the ground,” Nalezynski said.
UB’s Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership was established in 1987, and its flagship one-year program is generally directed at more established companies. The High-Tech CEL program was established about four years ago and has steadily grown in popularity, said Tom Ulbrich, CEL executive director.

“What’s different from most other programs is these are more scalable companies,” Ulbrich said. “These are the ones that could go from 0 to 100 employees in two to three years.”

The course costs $995 for the first person from a company, and $495 for subsequent employees of the same company. It is directly overseen by Mary Nicoletti, a senior program coordinator in the School of Management. The next program will be held in spring 2015. Those interested in more information can call the CEL at 716-885-5715 or mgt-cel@buffalo.edu.

Besides Nalezynski, the graduates included Phyllis Burgio of Burgio Health Alliance, East Amherst; cousins Brendon and William “Clark” Dever of Heads Up Display, Buffalo; Pearl Griffin of Buffalo BioLabs, Buffalo; Kashif Haque of Corduroy Diagnostics, Buffalo; Chandan Krishna, Ning Lin, Maxim Mokin and Ashish Sonig of UB Neurosurgery, Amherst; Paul Lee and Christopher Mastin of syr.indi.care, Williamsville; Pamela Marcucci and Michael Springer of the Jacobs Institute; and Brita Moe of Moefly, Buffalo.

Brendon Dever said the program was especially valuable because all the companies are at a similar stage, developing their prototypes, doing market research and formulating penetration plans. Heads Up develops software and hardware for wearable devices that allow the user to make data-driven decisions in real-time. It’s located at the downtown Z80 Labs Inc. and has been accepted into the Start-Up NY tax breaks program. Dever has been in New York City for several weeks fundraising.

“It definitely helped us prepare for some of the questions VCs will be asking,” he said. “It was a trial run, so they poked holes and prodded and made sure we had the answers.”

Lee, of syr.indi.care, is a full-time ophthalmologist for WNY Retina Consultants. He’s developed a syringe that makes it easier for patients to inject themselves — something that can be difficult with a traditional syringe, especially if the patient has an affliction such as arthritis.

The program “puts you in touch with the real world in terms of how you can take a product to fruition,” Lee said. “It gives you a perspective of the landscape, and you have a much better idea of how you can take a product to market.”

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