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Health Care

Executive Profile: Medable CEO Michelle Longmire is changing the way clinical trials are conducted



Michelle Longmire is cofounder and CEO of Medable Inc.

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By Ron Leuty – Staff Reporter, San Francisco Business Times
Jan 15, 2021, 8:00am EST

As Covid-19 hit, hospitals shut down access to anyone other than Covid patients and patients shied away from coming into doctor’s offices, threatening the integrity of many drug clinical trials. It has proved to be Medable Inc. and CEO Michelle Longmire’s moment to shine as regulators allowed drug developers to shift to remote collection of data from patients in clinical trials. The company developed a technology platform that remotely streamlines clinical trial design, recruitment, retention and data analysis. Although the five-year-old company won’t provide exact figures, it says revenue was up 500% in 2020. It was a long haul, however for Longmire and her co-founders to put themselves in a position to benefit from the shift spurred by Covid. Longmire was born for science: Both of her grandfathers were recruited to Los Alamos National Laboratories, both of her parents are scientists and her mother was one of the first female plutonium chemists. Business was a different story. “I’ve always seen myself as an inventor, not an entrepreneur,” Longmire said, “until I came to Stanford.” As a Stanford University dermatology resident and later an attending physician, she was faced with the challenge of

enrolling patients in narrow clinical trials. If the goal is to get experimental drugs through the study process into patients who need them, she thought, the process must move faster. “I didn’t really realize what an entrepreneur was until I ended up at Stanford,” Longmire said. “And then it became more clear that there was this whole world where you can invent things and that I always loved the idea of commercializing things.”

DR. MICHELLE LONGMIRE

Medable

Headquarters: Palo Alto
Founded: 2015
Co-founders: Michelle Longmire (CEO), Perry Robinson (general counsel and chief compliance officer), Tim Smith (chief technology officer) and James Sas (chief architect)
Employees: 180
What it does: Streamline trial design, recruitment, retention and data analysis with a software platform to connect patients, clinical trial sites and drug-development teams
Total funding: About \$136 million, including a \$91 million Series C round in November that was led by Sapphire Ventures

Personal

Education: Bachelor’s degree in biology and political science; M.D., University of New Mexico; residency at Stanford University School of Medicine
First job: A summer internship with a high-school friend at Los Alamos National Laboratory
On the reading list: “A Most Elegant Equation: Euler’s Formula and the Beauty of Mathematics,” by David Stipp. “It makes you wonder what the underlying thesis of the universe is, and it opens the idea that there could be a tremendous amount of connectivity or harmony in the universe,” she said.
Pet peeve: Laziness
First activity after Covid pandemic is over: See my team in Europe and go to London — some of my favorite places in the world
Favorite local restaurant: Evvia Estiatorio in Palo Alto or Kokkari Estiatorio in San Francisco

THE (NEW) ROUTINE

BLOOD PUMPING START

The workday begins with emails and connecting with colleagues before a client presentation

KEEPING FUELED

Generally leave the office around 5 p.m. for a second workout, usually one hour of cardio listening to either a book on tape or hard core rap.

BACK ON HER FEET

Generally leave the office around 5 p.m. for a second workout, usually one hour of cardio listening to either a book on tape or hard core rap.

How are you changing the world? The biggest opportunity to make change fast and unlock research is to get effective therapies to patients faster by allowing access to anyone in the world versus those living next to sites doing research.

How do you get patients to sign onto this? Patients may be looking for new therapies or new mechanisms and we can tie in how digital is going to meet that person initially. But I think also we solve the problem of how that person is engaging in a clinical trial for sometimes three or five years. Oftentimes, it relates to understanding the doctors who are serving those patients and enabling them to onboard patients digitally.

Why hasn’t someone done this before the way Medable is doing it? There was a lot of reluctance by drug developers. If you have an established way of doing something, risk is a limiting factor. Then there was Covid – and necessity is the mother of adoption as well as invention. Pharma wanted to connect to

people remotely and we can accelerate enrollment (in a clinical trial) by a factor of three.

So you're solving a "time is money" problem? For each therapy, patients are waiting. It's the most important factor in clinical trials. Time is a very key part of it.

Is there a chance though that drug makers or, perhaps more importantly, regulators will go back to the "old way" when the pandemic is over? I think it's unlikely. There's been a big effort in the community to say, "There's no going back, because we've seen the benefits." It goes back to project work speed. If you asked someone in 2019, nobody thought we could deliver multiple Covid vaccines in the timeline we did. But the proof is in the progress.

What's to stop competitors from catching up? It's generally not easy. It takes a lot to ensure that you have global data security and privacy completely nailed. We're in 60 countries in 40 languages. That piece alone is pretty tricky. And then you really need to understand patients and you need to understand clinical research. We have a strong philosophy that winners focus on winning and losers focus on winners.

What's your biggest challenge? We have a really strong sense of the future we want to build. Some of those areas where we want to be there are no barriers to access, but other places require additional changes from the regulatory environment and from health care in general. One of our biggest challenges is the guardrail – the conventional methods and status quo that isn't aligned with the value that we're really mission-driven to deliver. The barriers are just the ways in which patients want the world to be for health care versus the way it's currently designed.

What does Medable look like in five years? We're a company that is innovating at the intersection of new medicine, patients and technology, and I think that there's a really big opportunity for us to enable a technology ecosystem that partners deeply with patients on that journey in research.

What's the most surprising lesson you've learned in business? Scientists discredit the intellectual joy in solving business challenges. This ultimately is an optimization problem and hard to model because it's

constantly changing. The second thing is that outsiders think great companies are really kind of perfect and work according to “the business book.” But companies are unique and different and derive their own outcomes. There’s no set equation or path. I really learned that culture, founders, philosophies, perspectives and personalities are key aspects of differentiation. I thought I could learn this in business school, but the reason for great companies is that none of that came from a business school book. It’s unique to a group of people. Airbnb and Palantir and Tesla and PayPal – those companies are what they are because of the founders and the uniqueness of the founders.

What caused you to pivot from being an academic scientist to the business world? When I started to show my colleagues the solution we had developed in dermatology, every one of my colleagues in other specialties thought it would be useful, so we started to realize our platform could be built to support different applications. We have the luxury of taking 80 to 90% of the investment in the underlying platform and evolving the application layer to really meet the needs of these very diverse conditions.

You listed laziness as your pet peeve and said you can only think of a few times you were bored. What was one of those? One time was when I was in college, in an entomology class, and I was like, “This is it! I can’t tolerate this!” It was to the point where I have a memory of being upset by it.

Who do you admire? (Nobel Prize-winning scientist) Roger Penrose. His background is in algebraic geometry, but he has done some things, like creatively driven ideas and concepts, that have advanced society tremendously. It’s the application of an understanding of math to other facets, such as physics and consciousness that have really opened people’s eyes. He’s an incredibly broad thinker. The other sounds cliché, but it would be my mother. She was somebody who opened doors, and she always was herself: funny, creative and always just Vicki.

You played Division I soccer at New Mexico. What does that say about you? I love working in teams. Teams are how you produce awesome outcomes. We want to be strong to one another but unbeatable to the world.

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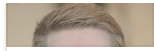
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