

INTERVIEW

Figure1, a new tool to foster Medical Education



Dr. Joshua Landy is a Canadian critical care specialist, having completed his M.D. at the University of Western Ontario, his internal medicine residency at the University of Alberta, and his critical care fellowship at the University of Toronto. In 2013, Joshua co-founded a venture capital funded mobile health startup called Figure 1, a medical case-sharing platform available to the medical community. Figure 1 is currently available as a free download for Apple or Android users and has over a million users in 190 countries.

RevMed: What was the “driving force” and main purpose behind creating Figure1?

Joshua Landy: I am a practicing physician, and I often work overnight shifts in the ICU. It was during the middle of one of these shifts that I started thinking about a community like Figure 1 that could bring healthcare professionals together to learn from medical cases. I was constantly encountering cases that others could learn from, and I wanted to find a way to share them globally while protecting privacy. That’s where the idea for Figure 1 came from.

RevMed: As an emergency doctor what made you think about creating an app for medical discussion? Was it a complicated case you had to deal with or was it mainly to improve knowledge?

Joshua Landy: It was mainly to improve knowledge. There wasn’t one particular case that inspired Figure 1. It was only later that I thought of cases where Figure 1 could have helped me. For instance, I once treated a patient who

had been envenomated by a poisonous caterpillar while on vacation. We didn’t know this was the cause of her illness because the caterpillar wasn’t local to our area. If Figure 1 had been available then, we could have uploaded the case and asked people all over the world. I’m sure someone would have known the answer.

RevMed: What is the origin of the name “Figure1”?

Joshua Landy: The name “Figure 1” pays tribute to the labelling used for images in medical textbooks. The first image is often referenced as ‘Figure 1’.

RevMed: Knowing that smartphones are ubiquitous among teenagers and young adults, an app containing medical challenges is an awesome tool for students to learn and exercise their previous knowledge. How many students and health professions approximately use Figure1 currently? What do you think is the reason for this success?

Joshua Landy: 70% of U.S. medical students using Figure 1, and our total user base has more than 1 million healthcare

professionals. I think Figure 1 is successful because it taps into the mindset of medical professionals. The best way to keep your skills sharp is to teach others, and Figure 1 makes that easy.

RevMed: In your point of view, what is the next frontier for medical education?

Joshua Landy: There is so much more Figure 1 can do for medical education. We introduced a feature called Grand Rounds that allows institutions to share their expertise on a global scale. At a hospital, grand rounds is where an esteemed colleague will share a teaching case to an audience of approximately 100 other healthcare professionals. With Figure 1 Grand Rounds, we enable healthcare professionals to discuss teaching cases with an audience large enough to fill a stadium. I believe the next frontier in medical education will build on this concept of democratizing healthcare. We are also just starting to connect physicians and students one-to-one for mentoring, and I think there's a lot of possibility there.

RevMed: What is the toughest challenge managing an app, when the contents are updated daily and users are frequently emailed about their interactions?

Joshua Landy: The toughest challenge is probably scaling everything we do as the user base grows. When we only had a few thousand users, it was easy for me to handle verification and a lot of community management myself. Now that we have 1 million users, we are strategically building out our team in order to handle our new scale.

RevMed: Have you ever thought about giving up your original idea?

Joshua Landy: No, I have always believed in the idea.

RevMed: Behind the scenes, how many people work in the Figure1 and how do you organize your team?

Joshua Landy: Our team is made up of 35 people working in a multitude of areas, such as verification and moderation, communications, growth, and development. We also have doctors, nurses, and an in-house lawyer on staff.

RevMed: In your opinion, how social media nowadays may contribute to medical education?

Joshua Landy: I think medical education will always be most effective when it is delivered in a way that students like. Medical education through social media is the next step of that philosophy.

RevMed: How can students take advantage of technology without wasting time as we have so much information available and maybe they find themselves lost?

Joshua Landy: It's a good idea to ask other medical students and residents about what helped them. Give their suggestions a try and adopt the things that work with your individual learning style. Medical school is such a busy time and is already so full of information. I think adopting a few key tools that work with your own learning style can make the whole process more enjoyable.

RevMed: There are multiple apps and pages in social media where people can publish and discuss medicine, what makes Figure1 stands out as a different app from the others?

Joshua Landy: The global community on Figure 1 is what makes it stand out. There are more than 1 million healthcare professionals from all over the world using the app. On Figure 1, you can speak to radiologists in major U.S. teaching hospitals, physicians in Ghana and the Peruvian rainforest, and nurses working in some of the busiest trauma units in the world.

RevMed: We see that privacy is a major concern in the app, how do you manage the patient's privacy? Is there any filter for the cases in order to know if they are real?

Joshua Landy: On Figure 1, we don't allow any identifying patient information like birthdays, names, or full faces. We take a number of steps to make it easy to remove this information. There's an automatic face block, as well as a blocking tool for any other details that need to be removed. There's also a consent form built right into the app. The patient can sign the phone screen with their finger, and the healthcare professional can have a copy emailed to them. Lastly, someone on our team approves every case before it's shown on Figure 1.

RevMed: How do you see Figure1 in five to ten years?

Joshua Landy: We're focused on reaching every healthcare professional in the world with Figure 1. We hope to become the central nervous system of healthcare.

RevMed: Stimulating entrepreneurship among students is a huge differential nowadays, how this new areas of startups can help them? Could you give us some tips of how to be an entrepreneur?

Joshua Landy: To be an entrepreneur, you need to take advice from others, adapt what works, and discard the rest. It takes a tireless devotion to a vision and the ability to admit when you're wrong. My advice for those just starting

is to have as many coffees as you can with successful entrepreneurs. Try to soak up as much knowledge as you can.

RevMed: What have you been learning when it comes to leading a startup that you have never imagined that a doctor could perform?

Joshua Landy: There's a lot of crossover between working at a startup and working as a physician. In medicine and in business, you must analyze data, make quick decisions, and know how to manage your time to get the important things done. I think my training as a physician has actually been useful for starting a company.