Visit the dentist in the comfort of your own home…thanks to AI

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

This is a podcast by Lumina, the perfect space to innovate, collaborate, and grow in health, science and tech. Dr. Padma Gadiyar, welcome to HealthTech Talks.

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

Thanks for having me here, Rebecca.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

Dr. Padma, you describe yourself as a leading healthcare consultant and disrupter. You're an experienced dentist, entrepreneur and advocate for leveraging technology in dentistry to enhance patient care and practice efficiency. You're the creator of Smilo, and we're going to learn more about Smilo.ai today. You're also an author and a renowned speaker. It's an absolute pleasure to be talking with you today, Dr. Padma, as the third interview in our three-part series on business and client relationship automation. Let's start by talking about Smilo.ai, such a great business name. Can you tell us what Smilo.ai is and how the idea for the business came about?

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

Smilo.ai is a digital platform that uses artificial intelligence and smartphone technology to bring dentists in your pocket. We do dental check-ups, no pain, no needles, low cost, and guess what? In less than three minutes, you get your personalized oral health report anywhere, anytime, in just a click of a button.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

And you don't have to go to the dentist.

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

No. You do it all from where you are, where you're comfortable, no anxiousness, no anxiety. You can do it from your smartphone.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

So it uses artificial intelligence or AI. Now, AI is becoming a tool many businesses are gravitating towards. How is AI built into your platform?

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

We use image recognition and computer vision technology. Basically as a dentist, which I am, how I would look into your teeth and identify problems in the same way we get you to submit five of your mouth selfies and based on what we can see, like a dentist, that's how our AI is trained. We identify problems, screen them for you, and tell you what's going on in simple, plain language, making communication, education simple and easy.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

So I can be sitting at home, take some photos. I'm assuming that would be guided by the app so that you're getting all the angles that you need.

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

Absolutely.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

And that then is sent through to a dentist or does the AI then do that part?

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

The AI does the part. That's how we have trained it. Post to that, we do have different call to actions, whether it's booking a service with a dentist based on the recommendations that you need treatment done, or maybe you don't need a treatment but need better products to use at home. That's where the actual oral care happens. That's at home. Or you can talk to a dentist via telehealth.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

So how did you come up with the idea?

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

I'm a dentist myself, a multi-practice owner myself. But inherently, I was looking at, as a dentist, I can treat eight patients to 10 patients a day. As a multi-practice owner, I could treat, what, 100, 200 patients a day. But even in a country like Australia where we have the best healthcare systems in the world, more than 50% of our population do not visit the dentist.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

Is that right?

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

Absolutely. And this number is just rising and rising because of the cost of living.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

Is that the main reason they don't go because of the cost of living? Or is it that fear as well that some people have?

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

We've done our research and the research says it's not just the cost, it's the unknown. They don't know what's going to come out and how much it's going to cost. The second is the fear. Fear of their past experiences, fear of the needle, fear of the smell, fear of the sound. We know it's a drill, fill, and bill kind of a thing. So that can all cause a lot of anxiety within people. But another important thing that actually

highlighted once I started building Smilo.ai is accessibility to care. A lot of our rural regional population, our priority population, the disabled, the kids, and our older population, to not actually get the care that they want or they deserve. And we were building a solution with scale in mind, with the ability to be available all the time, making it affordable for them, and most importantly, take the barrier of cost and fear out.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

So you've gone from being a dentist, working clinically every day to now being an entrepreneur. What challenges have you come across in that journey and then also developing the app?

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

Challenges are part of an entrepreneur's life and especially if you are solving a problem of this caliber. Oral health has always been neglected by people. It's only when you're in pain that you actually go to the dentist. So the biggest challenge has been the education piece, the knowledge gap, and making sure to let people know that a solution like this exists and this is a possibility. And we'll be able to do a lot more than just do dental checkups like diabetes, heart diseases, pregnancy, cancer care. There's a lot of impact of oral health on all these kind of diseases as well. So there is more to what we are doing than just remote dental checkups.

Now, building the app was because I'm a non-technical founder, I come from a very strong clinical background and a business background. I've built multiple brick and mortar businesses. So the biggest challenge was for me to understand how the technical world works, how the MVP is made, how do you collect feedback from people and all the regulatory compliance framework, the legality around it.

We didn't have to think all this in a brick and mortar business because we already had a fixed formula around it. So the challenges while building the solution or the app is you have to be very precise and efficient with everything you do from as simple as UI/UX research to making sure your AI works and is actually doing a great job at what it is, and then figuring out how to actually bring the solution out in the market and promote it and sell. So every step as an entrepreneur, I've been challenged. As a founder, I've been challenged. As a clinician, I've been challenged. So it's been a fun ride, but one of the most difficult rides I've taken.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

And you're still going?

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

Oh, yeah. It's not just the passion to solve this problem, it's the purpose because over 85% of the global population do not have access to oral healthcare. And if we can bring this into their hands, it'll just change the way we've been perceiving how dental care dentistry or oral health is.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

And as you were saying, the flow on effects of oral health on your entire health is just so important, isn't it?

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

Absolutely. And that's the insights we are deriving at the moment, especially with diabetes care, pregnancy, young kids, young mothers, cancer care. That's where we are actually seeing a lot more impact that can be created.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

Now, Padma, what are the benefits of Smilo for dental practices? How can the app connect with patients better and drive practice growth?

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

I'm a dental practice owner myself. When a patient walks into the chair, that's when we all get paid. And we do not have a way of connecting with our patients once they've left the practice efficiently. And we only see them every six months if they're really good, but most of them every two to three years. So that's where Smilo comes into help, reassuring them that we are there in their pocket when they need us.

And people going through extensive dental treatment, it's a reassurance for them that they can submit the photos if something's going on, if there's a bleeding, a suture that's ruptured, it's still hurting after about seven to eight days. It just helps them to communicate with their dentist better, saves on traveling, saves on time. And for dental practices, this is a cost-effective solution because otherwise, over that 15 minutes of review, they have to maintain the infection control, they have to pay their DAs, but they cannot actually charge the patient because the treatment's already done. So with all of that, it improves productivity and efficiency for dental practices. So they are saving time, making more money.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

And tell me more about how the app then takes care of the day-to-day matters. Does this mean less admin work for dental practice owners?

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

Yes, there is less admin work, but it promotes communication better. The patient, the front office and the dentist are all on the same page, which makes them run on time. It's more than the admin work. In dental practices, the biggest challenge for us is to run on time and making sure we are all on the same page, making communication and education simpler. So even if the patient submits these images before they come into the practice, the front office knows how much time to book them for. The dentist knows, "Okay, the patient's coming for this problem, but what else do I need to speak to them about in this appointment so that I can treatment plan them better?" So all throughout there is efficiency, efficiency, and efficiency.

Announcer:

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We've touched on this Padma, but I wondered as well from a patient perspective, how do they actually use the app and what are the benefits?

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

It's a simple link. Click on it, it's self-explanatory. Tell us why you're there. Submit your photos. The app actually directs you or guides you in the process. In three minutes, we give you your personalized oral health report with identifying what's going on in your mouth and making recommendations for you.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

Do you see children being able to use it, like parents using it on their children?

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

Absolutely. That's something I really advocate for because habits start young and we know that a lot of kids miss school because of dental problems. In Australia alone, our numbers have risen three times more during COVID. Kids complaining of toothache untreated tooth decay. Queensland alone sees more than 20,000 dental hospitalizations every year. So you can imagine it's mostly the kids, and we don't want them to have that anxiety of fear of dental pain, or we don't want them to miss school or have any confidence issues because of oral healthcare. So starting young and using this on kids is absolutely my personal vision.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

And so all the children would have to do is just stand there while mom or dad or their carer take some photos in their mouth.

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

And trust me, we've done this experiment before. And kids absolutely love it and they're so good at taking pictures than me or any mom there, they're so good at it. And they actually have a better educational experience of their oral health than anything because they can actually see, "Oh, yeah, I'm not brushing here properly. Oh, look at that. What's that black thing there? I should brush them more. Oh, why do you think that's happening to me? Is it because of my lollies?" So you will get them to interact with you better with no fear.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

So where do you see Smilo.ai in the next two years, Padma?

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

Globally. We are already working in the Indian market. We are already moving into the Middle East market. We want to have an extensive range of customers that we work here in Australia as well, whether it is the dental practices, pharmacies, the disability space, we've already got a grant in the aged care space to customize a solution for aged care. So we will be working with organizations that work

with the chronic disease patients like diabetes or heart diseases or cancer. So that's where we are focused here in Australia.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

When did you start?

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

Oh, I must say this most of my COVID baby. It just started as an idea. We had a lot of time. During COVID, one of the professions that was highly impacted was dentistry because we are a high aerosol producing profession, we realized, especially me, I realized at that time as a practice owner, if a patient doesn't come in, we don't get paid firstly. Second of all, everybody can put off dentistry until they are in pain. And thirdly, how do we actually monitor our patients who are going through aligner treatment, who are going through some real high-level of gum care that is going on, like gum treatments that are going on? How do we monitor kids, especially because they're at home eating whatever, how do we manage their caries like decay and everything? So that was the question I was constantly asking myself, and that's how we came up with the solution.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

Now, Padma, you're a graduate of the LuminaX HealthTech Accelerator Program, and for those who aren't familiar with the program, LuminaX is a leading Australian accelerator that takes startups through a rapid HealthTech program aimed at accelerating growth and fast-tracking connections and customers. How did the program accelerate your business?

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

Firstly, there are many accelerators in Australia. What stands out and what differentiates LuminaX is it's a HealthTech accelerator. And HealthTech is not something that is talked about enough in the venture space, in the startup space because the success Australia has seen is mainly around mining, around advertising, EdTech, FinTech, HealthTech is still a budding kind of an area. So an accelerator purely focused to HealthTech, accelerator purely focused in a health pressing where it's so close to Gold Coast Hospital and all the other healthcare institutions like Griffith.

So that is what makes LuminaX very, very different, firstly. Secondly, from my experience here, I think the mentoring was fantastic. I think we have to give a huge round of applause for Ben, Dren, who actually put the effort to understand not only the problem and the solution, your company and everything, but you as a founder, what is your vision? So they can connect the right dots and create pathways of connections, introductions, networking. I think that's what you need to create for a founder. We need that support as we are growing. That's what LuminaX gave me, that safe place where I could actually come and share my challenges. I could openly ask for help. Even today, I can still come back and ask for help. So that's the sort of trust and support they have given me.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

Padma, what advice do you have for other business owners looking for support and advice in business?

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

Look, I think I'm too young to give anybody any advice, but what I would say is know what you want, know your strengths, know your weaknesses too, and never, never hesitate to go and ask for help.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

Very good advice.

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

There's so many things that we think we know, but we don't know. So there is no ego, no hesitation, no judgments, especially in spaces where people are actually building businesses and solving problems. So go for it. Follow your heart, follow your dream, but make sure you create a cohort of people around you who are there to lift you up because this journey as a business owner and entrepreneur, a startup founder, is very, very challenging and mentally draining.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

You mentioned there about the challenges of being a founder of a startup business, being a business person, an entrepreneur, and something that you talked about before we started our interview was just that self-care and looking after yourself. How important has that been for you on this journey?

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

Look, we all know self-care is very important, but then the business needs, the family needs, the personal needs come much ahead of self-care. And though I have been pretty decent, I would say I've not been great. There has been ups and downs in the way I even approached things, and I had come from quite a stressful atmosphere myself being a dentist, running multiple practices and stuff. But this game is completely different if you do not have the discipline, if you do not have a routine and you do not have a set of people you can talk to on a regular basis, you might call them advisors, you might call them board members, you can call them anything. I just call them my panic button.

So you need that people, because there will be brain fog. There will be roadblocks all the time. As a HealthTech founder, a female founder, on the top of that, the biggest thing is there are very few wins, probably the ones you post on LinkedIn, but there is bunch of failures that you never talk about. So you actually need to be strong and strong-hearted, mentally strong, and look after yourself because this journey is not easy. It's long. It's lot of sleepless nights, early mornings, non-stop meetings, travel, your food gets affected, your relationships can be affected. So making sure even before you start and having that conversation, having that communication with your family is very, very important.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

Now, in 2023, you were named as one of Queensland's 40 Under 40 by In Queensland. Congratulations. That's amazing.

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

Thank you.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

Now, this program acknowledges the movers and shakers of the young business world. What did that recognition mean to you and your business, Padma?

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

Oh, Rebecca, I can't express that in words because I'm a migrant. I moved to Australia from India, and I did not even imagine something like that can ever happen to me. It was not in my goals or dreams. I'm a small town girl, move to Australia with just a dream of having a better life. But this country has welcomed me with open arms, given me opportunities, given me a chance to build a life where it's not only growing personally, but also professionally, I don't have to think I can go and attempt to do something totally different.

So this recognition for me was more than just an award. It was like the work I have done is meaningful. It's actually impacted people. It's actually being recognized. So that was the sort of happiness it brought to me. It was not the award. It was like I am truly being accepted as an Australian now, the work I'm doing is being appreciated. So that was that moment, the penny dropping moment for me, as I was walking through to collect that award.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

That's so very special. Congratulations. Thank you so much for talking with us today. It's been really wonderful and I can't wait to see where Smilo.ai is in a couple of years time.

Guest: Padma Gadiyar:

Thank you.

Host: Rebecca Griffin:

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