

Lung patients' big break

BREAKTHROUGHS are at the heart of Wideblue's business and one of the latest from the product developer is set to transform the lives of patients with breathing difficulties caused by conditions such as asthma and chronically blocked lungs.

Currently, monitoring lung health, by measuring CO₂ levels in exhaled breath, means people spending hours connected to a machine in hospital.

However with new, hand-held device N-Tidal, now in 'second-stage clinical trials, accurate assessments using a traffic lights-style warning system can be done quickly by patients at home or in GPs' surgeries.

To develop the monitor and intelligent software for client Cambridge Respiratory Innovations, Glasgow-based Wideblue reduced the size of the technology and introduced innovative infra-red optics.

"Miniaturisation allows the sensor we use to be located in front of someone's mouth giving a much better resolution," explains managing director Russell Overend.

"Replacement breath tubes mean N-Tidal can be used by multiple patients with no cross-contamination.

"This is groundbreaking and far more comfortable. There is potential



Maisha Frost

application for use in other acute conditions affecting the lungs, too, such as coronavirus, although this would require further research."

Medical and optical devices offer the biggest growth prospects and now

account for 70 per cent of projects for Wideblue which has a team of 18 scientists and turns over £1.6million.

"Most product designers stop before or at the working prototype stage," explains Overend. "But we do more than that,

going right the way through to volume manufacture, software optimisation, testing, updates and cost reductions."

With its roots in traditional camera technology that lost out when digital arrived, Overend's 2006 management buyout of Polaroid's European Design



MEDICAL INNOVATIONS: Overend's leading the way

Centre allowed staff to apply their skills to new products and sowed the seeds of Wideblue today.

Customers include big firms, crowd-funded start-ups, university spin-outs and R&D collaborations.

"Clients get a detailed quote of what it takes to get to market," says Overend. "Having a realistic understanding of the process at the start is vital and most appreciate this."

With consumers increasingly into retro charm, Wideblue designed the first in a new generation of Polaroid cameras now being sold by CurrysPC World, and to expand the business in

2018 Overend sold a majority share to US engineer Pivot International.

"This is not a common model, but works well for medical devices. We operate independently but benefit from access to their supply chain," he adds.

Acquisition of advanced electronics specialist A2E, with its energy and defence sector clients, has strengthened app and software development – essential parts of all new products.

"We get a good buzz out of our customers' success," says Overend, "especially knowing how we can help people with their disease."

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