

Bruno Soares CEO, Coimbra Genomics, Portugal



“Our mission is to improve patient healthcare by bringing high quality and validated genomic knowledge into everyday clinical practice.”

17.07.2018

Tags:

[Portugal](#), [Coimbra Genomics](#), [Genomics](#), [e-Health](#), [Digitalization](#)

Coimbra

Genomics aims to make genetics easier. The company has developed Elsie, a digital platform that helps make better individualized clinical decisions. They have recently been recognized as the "second biggest promise in European Health". Bruno Soares shares the Coimbra Genomics story, plans and exciting news for 2018, and how Elsie could be the solution that speeds the adoption of genomic based medicine.

Could you please introduce Coimbra Genomics to our international readers?

Coimbra Genomics is a young company working in Digital Health and Precision Medicine. Our mission is to improve patient healthcare by bringing high quality and validated genomic knowledge into everyday clinical practice. Our initial focus is on helping make existing processes around genetics usage more efficient by bringing digital tools to all the stakeholders, from hospitals and other healthcare units, to doctors of multiple specialties, and to genetic service providers. To achieve our goal, we have created a digital platform, Elsie, that links all these stakeholders and we work closely with clients and partners to continuously improve our offering.

What led to you joining the company in 2013?

I used to work as Chief Scientific Officer for a startup in the UK, that focused on the creation of sequencing machines: next-generation hardware that would read the genetic code faster, more economically and more efficiently. The company established collaborations with Cancer Research UK and the Wellcome Trust Centre, amongst others. While interacting with those partners, I came to realize that there were clear and significant hurdles not only in interpreting the complex data generated, but importantly in communicating the biological or clinical conclusions to geneticists and other healthcare professionals. In other words, there was a real need to render genetic based information more digestible for doctors, so that they could continue to focus on improving the patient clinical outcome in a timely and cost-efficient manner.

Following 12 years of living in England, I decided to return to Portugal where I discovered Coimbra Genomics, which was on the cusp of developing a new software. I met with the then CEO, and we discussed what has now become our core focus: improving outcomes for the patient, by providing information in a straightforward way for doctors to become the bridge between doctors and genetic knowledge.

What have you achieved in the past five years of the company's activities?

[Featured_in]

In the past five years, we have created our core team and have developed our digital solution, Elsie (which takes its name from the middle name of one of the discoverers of the DNA structure, Rosalyn Elsie Franklyn). From the start, we listened attentively to doctors to better understand their needs and difficulties when dealing with genetics. It is critical that we understand their needs and not just those of the people producing the reports. We have overseen the first usage of Elsie and have learned a substantial amount from the feedback received. Currently, our focus has progressed to the commercial rollout of Elsie in Europe, particularly in Portugal, Germany, and the Nordics. We have been successful in entering the market and have established clear company targets for 2018 and beyond.

Elsie was recently called "the second biggest promise in health". Can you share with readers how Elsie works?

Firstly, receiving such an accolade at the time was a welcome morale boost and validated the work we are doing. We were further encouraged by the fact that soon after, we began to receive even more contributions from doctors, interested and motivated to help further develop Elsie. These doctors were excited about our initial solution and shared our vision for the future.

Elsie initial focus is on saving doctors's time, so they can continue to focus on patient care. It does this by simplifying and unifying existing processes, all the way from the identification of what test is needed for a given patient, through the request of that test (ensuring all the right documents are filled efficiently and correctly), to the final step of making reports available to the doctor in a secure way.

Another key element in this process are existing genetic service providers worldwide. They are doing a great job at creating the laboratory and analysis infrastructure needed to produce high quality genetic reports and for this reason they are our prime partners. Elsie helps them speed up their business processes, so that they can focus on producing even better quality answers. Additionally, by reducing marketing and support costs, it helps them retain existing clients and reach out to new ones in a more efficient way.

It is a win-win situation, whereby we jointly create value for the healthcare system with our users and partners. As we grow, we plan to provide more partners with better solutions, while linking the opportunities on the clinical and pharmaceutical sides, and further expanding our network.

Portugal remains a small market. What strengths does Portugal offer, and what is your internationalization strategy?

The intention and principal motivation for beginning in Portugal five years ago was to benefit from the excellent human capital in Portugal. We have been well received in Portugal, and our initial and ongoing work with local doctors and, in particular, with geneticists has been fundamental for our development.

[related_story]

However, the company was created with a clear international mindset and very early on started interactions with different stakeholders in other countries, both in Europe and elsewhere. The objectives were to ensure that the solution we were developing was also suitable for those regions and to start building a solid international reputation and network, that we could later exploit for commercialization.

How is the timeline panning out for approaching world markets?

We have already moved on from initial pilots in Europe, to first sales. We now need to be aggressive in our approach in reaching out to potential customers. This year, we will have our first dedicated sales person on the ground in Germany. In the Nordics, we are testing another type of sales channel. I emphasize that although we are based in Portugal, and the majority of the team is Portuguese, the drive is truly international, beginning with Europe: Germany and the Nordics are only the starting points. We are testing and fine tuning our processes in those regions and then plan to quickly replicate them as we grow.

What was the impact of the investment from Green Innovations in late 2017?

This investment enabled us to transition to a more commercially oriented phase of operations. The investment made allows us to consolidate the processes we have demonstrated, to strengthen our initial relationships, and to build the support structure in our target markets, preparing the company for the all-important aggressive commercial roll out in the second half of 2018.

Importantly, healthcare is a late adopter in general and is typically slow in rolling out new services; therefore, we also need to have the time to build trust with clients and partners. In fact, a large part of what we do ties in with the challenge of digital healthcare. Across the globe, stakeholders are looking to monetize the digitization of healthcare sustainably, by creating value and not just taking profit from the system. In Coimbra Genomics, we want to create value using our platform as a support tool for all the elements in the genetics ecosystem, so that the benefit for patients is tangible.

How do you communicate the value of your service offering?

Our core message is that we want to make genetics easier for everyone.

Exactly how Elsie helps make genetics easier for doctors, healthcare units, genetic labs, patients, healthcare systems or pharma companies is of course hugely different in each case. For example, if speaking with a doctor who has experience in genetics, the needs and requirements of this doctor will vastly contrast with those of a cardiologist who has not worked with genetics before. What we try to do is deliver a clear targeted message: we are not focused on the technology, but on the needs of the particular person with whom we are talking at a specific time.

Today a lot of this communication is done face to face, but as we have a clear roadmap to bring more and more of it into the digital world.

To what extent is the government receptive to this idea?

We are not yet actively engaged with governments because our first focus is improving doctors working lives. After all, we have something that doctors want to use. We know that uptake of our service will dramatically increase, as was the case for e-prescriptions in Portugal: their success was driven by doctors' realization that electronic prescription saves time. That said, we have been supported by funding bodies from local and European grants, and we know that the government is very supportive of young technological companies and is open to building a relationship.

To what extent is Portugal ready for such advanced innovation?

For some time now, Portugal has been making a big effort to encourage the creation and adoption of technological innovation in all sectors. As a country we definitely have a place on the world stage, given our excellent human capital. The ability to attract important events like the e-Health summit and the Web Summit is one way to become more visible and recognized internationally.

The one area where Portugal is still lagging behind is in the amount of high quality venture capital money available for smaller companies to progress. This can negatively impact our ability to retain talent nationally and I often focus on the importance of people within organizations, because without people, a company is nothing.

Despite that I am an optimistic person, we must be aware of the challenges in the market, and we must make sure that as a country we are stimulating all areas of the economy, from housing to infrastructure to healthcare. Moreover, it is paramount that our legal structure is robust enough to make quick and effective decisions, because legal processes have a knock-on effect on foreign investment. Portugal must attract good foreign investment because good investment attracts good people.

What is your five-year ambition?

We want Elsie to be the way that doctors across the globe access high-quality, credible and validated genetic knowledge. This will be a solution that links amazing doctors and healthcare units, with outstanding genetic service providers and enables the efficient, scalable and economically

sustainable usage of genetics to dramatically improve the healthcare provided to patients.portug

[See more interviews](#)
