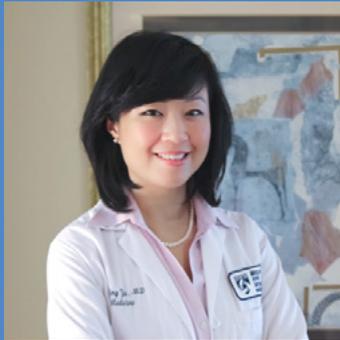# Five Questions with YiDing Yu, MD, Founder and CEO, Twiage

YiDing Yu, MD,
Founder and CEO

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When she's not working as an internist at Atrius Health in West Roxbury, Dr. YiDing Yu is trying to trying to revolutionize the way paramedics communicate with emergency rooms. Yu, the founder of the mobile technology company Twiage, has developed a faster way for first responders to relay vital health information to emergency rooms.

"What's great about companies like Twiage, is that we are taking something traditionally done through analog means with a phone call and making it entirely digital," said Yu during a recent sit down with Mass Tech.

In the past, ambulances crews would have to relay by radio important information about patients on their way to the emergency room. With Twiage, the process is done digitally and provides even more vital information than a radio call. Twiage streamlines the patient entry and handoff long before the ambulance even pulls up to the emergency room entrance.

Yu notes that her firm has benefitted immensely from being based in the Commonwealth, attributing Twiage's success to "the amazing community here in Boston." With its many world class hospitals and ambulance firms, Boston has established itself as a major hub of EMS and first response innovation.

Q: . Digital health is such a broad term. What does it mean to you?

"It can be such a broad definition. Digital health to me means leveraging modern technologies to advance care. We already have EKG machines? How could we use a phone to enable a mobile EKG machine for an everyday person or medic? Let's make patient engagement more than filling forms or papers. Startups like Twiage are taking something traditionally done by analog means through a phone call and making it entirely digital."

Q. There will always be people skeptical of digitizing existing structures and processes. Why is it so important we bring healthcare into the digital age?

"I think that consumers are already taking us there. If the rest of us don't get there, we're just going to be behind the curve. For a very long time people said, 'The only people who still use pagers are drug dealers and doctors.' Well guess what? Drug dealers don't use pagers anymore! We still do.

Medicine is great at developing new drugs, medical devices–that's fantastic–but we're not leveraging technology to make it easier for patients to access care or for doctors to communicate and work together. All of us have our smartphones, we have multiple chat apps to help communicate with friends and family, but for whatever reason we have chosen not to embrace that in health care. It would be better for patients and providers if that changed."

Q. Your company clearly has had success in the Massachusetts digital health space. What do you attribute that success to?

"I would attribute the success we have had to the amazing community here in Boston, in Massachusetts. Boston is an area where there is a tremendous amount of EMS and first response innovation. The moment we came up with the idea at a hackathon there was buzz about it in the Boston Globe, emails about it were sent around in hospitals. By the time we connected with our first hospital that ultimately piloted Twiage, the EMS manager there already knew about us even though we were just an idea at the time. That just shows that the hospitals here care about innovation and they want to be on that cutting edge. Massachusetts has that ecosystem where health care systems are willing to take a risk and do a test of new technology.

When we first talked to South Shore Hospital, who has been just a tremendous champion and an incredibly innovative hospital, they said they wanted to be the most connected hospital in their area. They want to be using technology to help patient care and to streamline their ER

operations because they're one of the busiest emergency departments in the state. That's the type of champion you find here."

Q. What can other companies learn from your success in Massachusetts?

"Other startups should look to Massachusetts for the opportunity to pilot their technologies. There are opportunities to engage with big hospitals downtown and the academic centers around the state. Then there are the many community hospitals that often move faster than the big academic centers because they have less bureaucracy and budgetary approval issues.

I think the other area where startups should look is at the ecosystem. There are multiple accelerators in town; there are many industry-leading labs and there is a strong investor community. Running a company is hard; running a startup is hard. Selling to hospitals is slow and painful and you need that community of advice and mentorship.

I'm a first time entrepreneur so I had to figure out how to run a company and how to raise money. How do you take an idea to reality and build a company out of it? A lot of health care startups die on the vine because they don't have the funding or the energy or the team to get there. You need that community to help you through and say, 'No, these challenges are actually normal. Here's how you expand your network, here's how you can raise your profile. Here's how you pitch a hospital. That community of support has been invaluable to me."

Q. What are your thoughts on growing to scale? What are the unique challenges about doing that here?

"Massachusetts has tremendous value-based payment and total cost of care models which promotes business model innovation. It's also a very competitive landscape. The hospitals here believe in innovation and they actually have the guts to try something new in their business model. Twiage increases revenue for a hospital because it drives higher EMS traffic. Once a hospital has success with Twiage, other hospitals start paying attention. It's been amazingly helpful to have a very vibrant community of health care systems who want to be better and actively compete with each other on innovation."

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