

## How Patients With Chronic Disease Become 'Patient Entrepreneurs'



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(NOAH SEELAM/AFP/Getty Images)

You probably haven't heard of the medical “patient entrepreneurs,” an innovative group initiated and organized by New York-based Lyfebulb, which featured them at the Swedish American Life Science Summit conference in Stockholm in August. The “patient entrepreneur” project helps people afflicted with chronic diseases to become more productive and financially independent by pursuing their specific skills.

Lyfebulb, a private organization whose purpose is to improve the quality of life of those living with chronic disease, has yet to grab news headlines. But it is

bound to catch worldwide attention particularly for its “patient entrepreneur” program. It refers to people who, in spite of suffering from a chronic disease, such as cancer or diabetes, decide to engage in business as a means of enhancing their lives.

How do the patients get to pursue such a productive path? Enter Lyfebulb, which is on a worldwide effort to help patients struggling with serious diseases “take charge” of their lives by providing them entrepreneurial and financial assistance to start a business or commercial venture based on their own experience and talent.

“Lyfebulb connects patients with industry and business leaders to get access to data and information to start a particular business and become financially sufficient while striving to survive a chronic disease,” says Dr. Karin Hehenberger, founder and CEO of Lyfebulb. “Lyfebulb bridges patient communities with industry, and provides a strong voice to people living with chronic disease by empowering them to become patient entrepreneurs,” she said. Herself a survivor of diabetes and kidney diseases, Dr. Hehenberger has 20 years of experience in life sciences who held executive positions at Coronado BioSciences, McKinsey & Co., Johnson & Johnson, as well as partnership roles at Brummer & Partners and SLS Ventures. She received her M.D. and Ph. D at Karolinska Institute in Sweden and completed post-doctorate in Joslin Diabetes Center and Harvard Medical School.

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She notes that 117 million people in the U.S. alone are affected by chronic disease, and that one in four adults have two or more chronic health conditions. And, some 86% of all costs for healthcare are due to chronic disease, Dr. Hehenberger points out.

So “patient entrepreneurs” are individuals who have utilized their medical diagnosis as their motivation to form businesses aimed at improving the quality of their lives even as they suffer from chronic illness, notes Dr.

Hehenberger. "Instead of waiting for solutions to come to you as a patient, you go out and start a business, build a product and change the future for yourself and others," she says. So the patient brings forward better products and also "inspires all patients to take charge of their health and be less of a victim."

"At Lyfebulb, we ask people to take charge, to live beyond the disease and utilize the patient experience when identifying solutions," says Hehenberger. In contrast to organizations which purely monitor and describe patient experiences, "we offer solvers, solutions, and inspire people to live Lyfe," she says. And increased engagement by patients improves adherence to drugs and devices, leading to better outcomes, Dr. Hehenberger adds. The additional focus by industry on patient entrepreneurs "means new and improved therapies, or even cures," she points out.