

PHF: Former Capital One bosses launch online service for doctors



NEW VENTURE: PHF Services (from left) Richard Gregory, Tom Acworth and Marc Rickard

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Medics given a hand with private work

By **RICHARD BAKER**
Business Correspondent

TWO former Capital One managers have teamed up to launch a business in Nottingham that looks set to take the pain out of private practice for hospital consultants. PHF, launched by Tom Acworth and Marc Rickard, acts as a centralised management for the private work done by consultants.

The business — which they claim is unique — organises appointments, transcribes medical notes, chases payments and provides the consultant with a secure online diary.

So far, 30 consultants across the country have signed up for the service, which Mr Acworth says is more cost-effective and more efficient than conventional practice management.

The business, based at Castle Cavendish Works, Radford, is tapping into the 21,000 consultants in the UK, who earn an average of £50,000 a year from their private practice sessions.

Mr Acworth and Mr Rickard came up with the idea after a business idea, based on lending money to people who could not normally afford private treatment, proved unworkable.

"When we looked at the way this admin work is normally done, we concluded that it could be done a whole lot more efficiently," said Mr Acworth.

"Consultants sometimes employ their spouse to do the work, or if they believe there is enough work, they will employ someone themselves."

But this throws up employment and tax issues. On top of that, consultants typically have 20-30% of their fees outstanding at any one time.

The duo have been joined in the business by sales and marketing director Richard Gregory.

He said: "What we do is provide the consultant with a dedicated number for their patients that is answered in their name. We arrange the appointments, and log them on a secure website which the consultant can view via their computer.

"After the consultant has seen the patient and

dictated clinical notes, we can transcribe the notes and publish them on their website.

"Then we bill either the insurance company or the patient, making sure the money gets collected and there's a clear financial record."

Mr Acworth added: "Once someone has started using our services, we build up a patient history online. Effectively, the consultant can run his clinic through his laptop.

"We can send text messages to patients reminding them about appointments — missed appointments cost money. We can take credit card payments and take the hassle out of doing all that."

"We are reaching a stage where consultants really do need to be more customer-focused," added Mr Acworth. "There is downward pressure on fees, private patients are becoming more aware of choices and it is becoming a more competitive market."

"We have already got a geographical spread of consultants from Glasgow to London to Yeovil. We have ambitions to grow to ten per cent of the market."

PHF employs 14 people, and includes two consultants on its board — John Webb, a consultant spinal surgeon at Queen's Medical Centre and John O'Dowd, a consultant spinal surgeon at Guys and St Thomas's Hospital in London. The company is chaired by Dr Jonathan Engler, a former hospital doctor who helped found Nottingham clinical technology company ClinPhone.

Mr Acworth says PHF intends to have the financial equivalent of 150 consultants on its books by the end of the year.

He added: "There may be opportunities in the NHS, too. I am sure there are departments that could benefit from a similar approach to what we have here."