

# Paperless pursuit: Clinical Ink raises \$2.7M for launch of tablet technology

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**A young firm that aims to eliminate mountains of paperwork from the clinical research process has raised \$2.7 million in debt and equity and signed a partnership to help it launch its first product.**

Clinical Ink's product is called [SureSource™](#), and it allows clinical trial sites to use tablet computers to input and track patient data in place of original paper source documents. Transcribing and validating paper documentation is often one of the largest expenses associated with getting a new drug or medical device through the clinical trial process, according to Clinical Ink CEO **Doug Pierce**.

The clinical research industry has been trying to become paperless for years and a number of companies have introduced products and software meant to facilitate electronic data capturing. But it's been hard to get nurses and researchers to give up their pads of paper and handwritten notes, Pierce said.

Clinical Ink's product is designed to replace that paper pad with an electronic document with the least possible disruption to the process, Pierce said. The software allows the researcher to write directly on the tablet PC, inputting their data into forms custom-designed for each clinical application. Data validation takes place instantly and automatically.

Normally, data collected on paper has to be transferred to the computer later, and each generation of transcription has to be audited for accuracy, Pierce said.

"By eliminating that, we eliminate huge chunks of the cost of clinical trials" which can run into the millions of dollars, he said.

Pierce co-founded Clinical Ink in 2007 with Dr. **Thomas Littlejohn** of Piedmont Medical Group, a network of clinical research sites based in Winston-Salem with locations around the Southeast.

They raised \$1.5 million in startup funding, mostly from local angel investors, and used that money to develop and test the first two versions of the system, Pierce said.

An additional equity raise of \$1.7 million plus bank funding of \$1 million from SunTrust Bank will support the new SureSource 3.0, the first full product launch

for the firm, he said.

A partnership with Pennsylvania-based ePharmaSolutions will help break its product into the market, Pierce said. EPharmaSolutions is a technology service provider that helps companies that conduct clinical trials choose and train research sites.

One thing ePharmaSolutions does, Pierce said, is score and validate patient assessments that are almost always filled out by nurses on paper, and about 30 percent of those assessments end up being thrown out because of errors that an electronic system such as Clinical Ink's could prevent, he said.

"What we do enhances their offering, and what it does for us is get us in the door" of a lot of potential customers, Pierce said of the partnership.

He declined to make specific sales projections, but Pierce said he is expecting the industry to react positively to the new product. From a core staff of seven employees now, he hopes to have about 25 employees by the end of the year working to create the custom databases for trials and support clients.

As for any technology startup, success is far from assured. But by raising enough money to fund development patiently and finding relevant partners to help it get started, Clinical Ink looks to be on the right track, said **Phil Waugh**, a former executive with [Krispy Kreme](#) and now with Trade Street Capital in Winston-Salem, who has invested privately in the firm.

Failing to raise enough money is probably the biggest challenge for companies at Clinical Ink's stage of growth, but the firm has what it needs, Waugh said. The other big challenge is avoiding distractions that veer the company off track.

"You have to focus in on what you do best, and so far they've done a very good job at that," Waugh said.

Reach Matt Evans at (336) 370-2916 or [mlevans@bizjournals.com](mailto:mlevans@bizjournals.com).

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