
Focused Ultrasound Foundation: Paving the Way for Responsible Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship in Health Care Services

Introduction

The model of the Foundation is not meant to be self-sustaining. The ultimate measure of our success will be our ability to put ourselves out of business. When focused ultrasound becomes a standard of care and has improved the quality of life for countless patients, the Foundation will be obsolete.

—Dr. Neal Kassell, Founder and Chairman,
Focused Ultrasound Foundation and
Professor of Neurosurgery, University of Virginia

Based in Charlottesville, Virginia, the Focused Ultrasound Foundation (FUSF) was an entrepreneurial medical research, education, and advocacy organization whose primary purpose was to improve the lives of millions of people with serious medical disorders including essential tremor, Parkinson’s disease, pain, and cancer of the prostate, breast and brain, by accelerating the development and adoption of focused ultrasound (FUS) technology. FUS was an early stage, noninvasive therapeutic technology with the potential to transform the treatment of many medical disorders by using ultrasonic energy to target tissue deep in the body without incisions or radiation. The technology had the potential to improve outcomes and decrease costs by serving as an alternative or complement to surgery, radiation therapy, drug delivery, and immunotherapy.

Founded in 2006 by Neal Kassell, a renowned professor of Neurosurgery at the University of Virginia, the FUSF was on the leading edge of the venture philanthropy and social entrepreneurship movements and had become a model for how donor funding could be used to bridge the gap between laboratory research and widespread patient treatment. In the following section, we provide an overview of FUS technology and the FUSF. In section 3, we describe the research, development, and growth strategy of the FUSF. A discussion on the FUSF’s impact and social implications is provided in section 4. Section 5 highlights some of the future challenges the FUSF may face as it continues to scale up.

Technology and Organization Overview

Founded in 2006, the FUSF was a tax-exempt [501(c)(3)] organization with a mission to bring FUS treatments to patients in the shortest time possible, to improve the quality of life and longevity of millions of

This case was prepared by Bala Mulloth, PhD, Assistant Professor of Public Policy, Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, University of Virginia; and Jessica Foley, PhD, Chief Scientific Officer, Focused Ultrasound Foundation, Charlottesville, VA. It was written as a basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate effective or ineffective handling of an administrative situation. Copyright © 2017 by the University of Virginia Darden School Foundation, Charlottesville, VA. All rights reserved. *To order copies, send an e-mail to sales@ardenbusinesspublishing.com. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, used in a spreadsheet, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without the permission of the Darden School Foundation.*