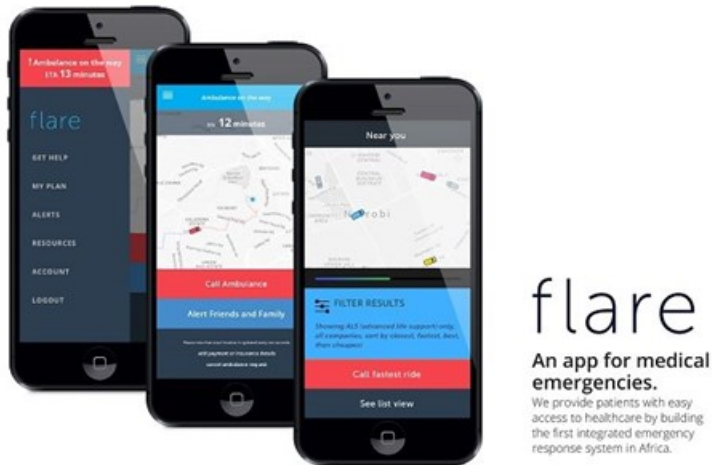


Kenyan startup to launch 'Uber for ambulances' app

By Tom Jackson

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Kenyan startup Capsule is set to launch Flare, a mobile solution that aggregates available ambulances onto a single system and allows patients or hospitals to request emergency help using their smartphone.



Flare app

[Flare](#) is the brainchild of Caitlin Dolkart and Maria Rabinovich, who between them have nearly a decade of experience working in the health space throughout Africa.

The app, which will be tested with ambulance companies in August and September ahead of the release of a Uber-style consumer-facing app at the end of the year, will allow patients or hospitals to see available ambulance options and request help quickly.

“Our simple and practical app and telephone hotline gives hospitals and patients access to ambulances, and enables private ambulances to reach more customers and make better data-driven business decisions,” said Dolkart. “During a pick-up, it alerts hospitals that a patient is on-the-way. Flare aims to ensure that when an emergency arises it takes minutes, not hours, to access care.”

She said the idea for Flare had arisen due to the enormous challenges prevalent in the Kenyan healthcare sector, notably the need to bring patients closer to a growing and uncoordinated healthcare marketplace.

“While new clinics, hospitals, pharmacies, doctors and ambulances are added to the system each year, demand has not kept pace in large part because there is a lack of technical infrastructure for patients to learn about and connect to their healthcare options,” Dolkart said.

“Today, there is no well-functioning emergency response dispatch system like 911. In Nairobi, Kenya it takes up to two hours to get an ambulance. During an emergency, patients struggle to locate and connect to private ambulance companies through their individual dispatch phone numbers. They are often unaware of their options and waste critical time. Meanwhile, there are up to one hundred available ambulances sitting idly around Nairobi waiting for patients.”

Flare has received support from different initiatives at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where Dolkart completed her MBA, and won some startup and entrepreneurship prizes. It also took part in the recent three-month Merck accelerator in Nairobi, and is in the process of closing its first round of funding for a full launch in Nairobi.

Once the testing period is over and Flare is properly launched, the startup will make money by taking a percentage of each ride booked through the app. Though the app is initially launching in Nairobi, Dolkart and Rabinovich foresee relatively quick expansion, with Mombasa and Kisumu on the radar for early next year.

“From there, we plan to move into Nigeria. There are a number of other major cities on our radar in East and West Africa,” Dolkart said. “We’re specifically targeting places where there’s an ample supply of ambulances, untapped demand, high penetration of smartphones, large private sector health care market, and also where there are already on-demand apps in the market like Uber.”

So is Flare simply “Uber for ambulances”? Not quite, according to Dolkart.

“A couple of major differences include the fact that our first customers are hospitals, which are super-users,” she said. “Right now, most of the ambulance traffic is between hospitals, who often do not have their own vehicles. Hospitals have trained personnel who know when patients require ambulances and what type of ambulance is needed.”

Another major difference is that each ambulance is attached to a company, and are not independent contractors.

“Within our platform, we will retain competition among the various ambulance companies,” Dolkart said. “Beyond distance to the patient, they can compete on a number of different variables, including type of vehicle, service level and price to name a few.”

ABOUT TOM JACKSON

Co-founder @DisruptAfrica. Tech and business journalist in Africa. Passionate about the vibrant tech startups scene in Africa, Tom can usually be found sniffing out the continent's most exciting new companies and entrepreneurs, funding rounds and any other developments within the growing ecosystem.

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