

Pressure on NHS helps medical firm expand

A PLYMOUTH company is preparing for rapid expansion after securing backing from two major City players and making it onto the NHS list of approved suppliers.

Squirrel Medical, based at Tamar Science Park, has restructured to focus purely on developing its range of mattresses designed to prevent pressure ulcers, commonly known as "bed sores".

The NHS alone is grappling with a £4 billion annual bill for dealing with the problem, which has claimed high-profile victims including and care homes are also increasingly looking for solutions to manual turning of bed-bound elderly patients.

And with compensation claims now running to £500,000 per case, the focus is increasingly shifting towards new technology to find a prevention.

Squirrel has its origins in a business called Cedeco, which developed numerous medical products over the years. That business has now been merged into the new company, which has the backing of growth consultancy Succession.

Its plug-in mattresses and seating solutions are designed to move the patient regularly to shift pressure and prevent ulcers forming.

The company, founded by brothers Gary and Rick Baker, and Gary's wife Eve, has grown on the back of sales to care homes and the public. It has now been accepted by the NHS purchasing and supply agency PaSA.

Succession – headed up by Devon-based duo Simon Chamberlain, one of the founders of Thinc and a former senior manager of Zurich, and Paul

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Morrish, former commercial director for Barclays – helps high-growth potential companies, preparing them for investment and expansion. The pair now sit on the board of Squirrel, which is among a growing investment portfolio.

Mr Chamberlain said: "The big thing we have done at Squirrel Medical is specialise in this product. They were selling 42 different products but by focusing on this one they can go into the market as a specialist and compete against the big players. It was about repositioning the brand going forward."

Martyn Butcher, newly-appointed clinical director at Squirrel, said growth projections of £2 million sales in the next few years were understated with the new NHS approval.

"It is a huge step for a small company," he told a launch gathering at Tamar Science Park. "Squirrel is about design, it's about manufacturing and it's about delivering; and it's about delivering products that are high quality, reliable and meet the needs of clinicians and patients in preventing pressure damage – and at an affordable price."

Gary Baker said the focus would be on consolidating its position in the UK market and developing exports to countries including China, South America and North Africa.

South West Devon MP Gary Streeter, who was at the launch, said the fact the firm was expanding in a recession was reflective of directors' confidence.



Simon Chamberlain and Gary Baker with Gary Streeter MP