

A Q&A Session with Saebo's Co-Founder, Henry Hoffman

Name/Title/Credentials: Henry Hoffman, MS, OTR/L

What is your educational background? Do you have any certifications/awards?

I graduated from D'Youville College with a Bachelors and Masters in Occupational Therapy.

What motivated you to become an occupational therapist?

I was very interested in improving and positively influencing individuals' lives. The feeling of encouraging a caregiver during trying times or contributing to the overall quality of life of a patient is indescribable.

Tell me about your company. How did you get started? What is the goal of your company? What types of products/programs do you offer?

My company is called Saebo, Inc. It was named after my Grandmother, Sarah Elieen Booth, who was very dear to my heart. Saebo, Inc., is a leading global provider of innovative rehabilitation products for stroke survivors and other neurologically impaired individuals. Headquartered in Charlotte, NC, the company was founded in 2001 by Henry Hoffman and John Farrell. When the company started there was a serious lack of treatment options for stroke survivors with upper limb impairment. Neurorehabilitation was a frustrating field ten years ago due to this common belief by many health professionals that patients have "reached a plateau" or "no further gains can be made". It was my belief that it was not the patient that had plateaued, but rather the treatment options. Our slogan, "No Plateau in Sight," was inspired by this mentality as we believed further functional gains can be made with innovative and revolutionary concepts. We felt that if we can develop products that will incorporate the non functioning limb in therapy and at home, then there would be an opportunity to improve motor recovery, and ultimately, overall quality of life.

Our neurological orthotic devices, including the **SaeboFlex** and **SaeboReach**, allow patients with very little residual arm and hand function to immediately begin performing task-oriented, grasp and release activities, thereby forging new pathways in the brain. Saebo's pioneering treatment program is based on new research documenting the brain's remarkable ability to "re-program" itself following injury.

We were named Most Valuable Product in 2008 by Therapy Times. The Saebo Program is now offered as a treatment option at over 2,000 clinics and hospitals nationwide, including 22 of the “Top 25 Rehabilitation Hospitals” as ranked by U.S. News & World Report. The Saebo orthoses are also eligible for reimbursement by Medicare and most commercial insurers. With a network of over 3,500 trained clinicians spanning four continents, Saebo is committed to helping stroke survivors around the globe achieve a new level of independence.

We also provide a very popular dynamic resting hand splint that is called the SaeboStretch. The therapists really like the SaeboStretch because of its unique features. There are 3 interchangeable dynamic hand pieces for the clinicians to choose from. The dynamic hand pieces protect the joints while maintaining range of motion and the wrist and fingers.

Since the birth of Saebo, we have witnessed therapists' excitement with offering new treatment options to their patients. In addition, patients who were 20 years post-stroke have realized progress and have gained the ability to do everyday tasks they had not been able to do for decades. We take pride in re-inspiring a profession and giving patients real tangible results and hope. To be an inventor on the forefront of an industry, you must develop products that are revolutionary, not just evolutionary.

Taking an industry, especially healthcare and medical treatment, to another level requires getting the industry to change behaviors and mindsets. Saebo also believes that treatment can and should be affordable. We are pleased to offer the healthcare industry affordable products that are reimbursed by most insurance companies including Medicare. By allowing neurological patients easy access to our innovative products, further functional gains can be made impacting his or her overall quality of life.

What do you do to get the word out about your company and its products/programs?

Word of mouth accounts for a majority of our exposure. The rest of our marketing efforts come from our newly design fully interactive website, trade shows, conferences, and regional clinical reps. We also partner with OT/PT schools to offer student-based learning.

I think we are fortunate in the sense that we are a therapy owned company operated by therapists for therapists. Each weekend we have the opportunity to meet new clinicians around the country during our 2 day seminars. We get to share ideas with each other and learn from them what is working in the clinic and what is not. What is practical and what is unrealistic. For growth and expansion to occur, I think it is crucial that we continue to have our fingers on the pulse of what therapists are feeling and thinking with respect to neuro rehab.

How have these products been received among those in the rehabilitation field and their patients?

Like any product or program, there are pros and cons to each. Some patients and therapists will excel with a particular product or program and some will not. Overall, I think our products have been widely seen as very successful and complimentary. Each year, we receive hundreds of beautiful testimonials from clinicians and patients describing their progress and how they have improved functionally. There is no better satisfaction than reading a testimonial about a patient whose life has improved for the better due to our efforts. I feel that is true divine inspiration.

Do you still practice clinically? If so, describe your position. If not, describe what a typical day is like for you.

My role has changed over the years to less clinical and more business management. I wear many hats at Saebo. Thankfully, we have a strong clinical team which allows me to be more involved in nonclinical areas. My main areas of focus are on sales and marketing, business development, and R&D. I still teach 2 Saebo courses per month on average as well.

Are there other areas of interest for you as a occupational therapist, either clinically or educationally, that you plan to pursue?

Prior to the birth of Saebo, my passion was in non-operative orthopedic medicine and manual therapy. When I worked at Burke Rehabilitation hospital I was the clinical specialist in outpatient and enjoyed working in Sports Medicine. I really miss that part of the profession.

As far as other future plans, I would enjoy teaching other clinicians on the steps involved when bringing an idea to market. Typically, clinicians are not business minded so I think this would be a fun and exciting venture. I have learned so much over the last 7 years and would be happy to share with others.

What are the greatest challenges you face in your job?

I face many challenges on a daily basis. I think of these challenges not as problems but opportunities. My greatest challenge/opportunity is to continue to offer innovative products that are affordable, practical, and reimbursable. We

have been very fortunate that we are able to offer great products that are reimbursed by many commercial insurance companies including Medicare.

What do you like most about your job? What do you dislike most?

There are so many positives about my job. If I had to narrow it down to one I would say seeing the reaction on patients and caregivers faces when they use our products for the first time. Words cannot describe the experience when a patient or a caregiver starts to “tear up” after they see themselves or a loved one use their hand for the first time in years. That is priceless. When you are doing God’s work it becomes so enjoyable that you forget that it is actually part of your job.

Are you currently involved with any research projects? Are there any projects that you would like to be involved with?

Over the past five years, Saebo has been involved in numerous research projects. We have been fortunate to have many Universities and hospitals become interested in conducting research projects involving their patients and Saebo.

Early on in the development of Saebo, we created a Scientific Advisory Board to oversee our projects. We are proud to have 2 pioneers in the field of stroke research on our board. Steve Wolf and Richard Bohannon review all of our proposals we receive from the Universities and hospitals. Following their review, they provide critical feedback and recommendations to improve the quality of the study.

Do you feel that the role of OTs has changed over recent years? If so, how?

Fundamentally, I feel our profession’s core principles have not changed much. Our goal is still the same - maximize ones independence. With a push for evidenced based practice, I think our profession is starting to branch out a bit and become more science based. We are starting to become more creative with effectively treating the impairment (without losing focus on the functional goal) where in the past the profession would lean more towards functional based activities as the main treatment choice. This is a controversial area. Some in our profession believe in the former while others believe in the latter.

With respect to neuro rehab specifically, how we improve one’s independence has changed over the years as new advances in technology and treatment approaches have come about. I feel we are much better at what we do today then we were a decade or 2 ago. I guess that is to be expected.

What do you feel is of the greatest concern to OTs today?

The lack of evidenced based research is a serious concern of mine. This is tied specifically to reimbursement and validity of the profession. OT's are generally not involved in much data collection. I would estimate that a majority of OT's do not perform reliable standardized measurements as part of their evaluation process for neuro rehabilitation. To me that is a concern.

Thankfully, more OT's schools are promoting evidenced based practice. We are seeing an increase in OT Saebo poster presentations throughout the country. I applaud the OT teachers who are teaching more research based treatment options and quieting the buzz on traditional theoretical approaches that have been around for years that lack evidence.

What is the most important thing you've learned over the course of your career?

One area that is always challenging for an owner of a company is to give up control and let other people help you. I learned early on in this business that you cannot do it alone if you want to succeed. You need to establish a great team and trust that they will do well. Delegating is crucial for growth. Saebo would not be where it is today without my co-workers. They are just as responsible for our success.

What advice do you have for others thinking of using your products/programs?

Our products are very therapy based. Some therapists will excel while others will struggle. It is like any other profession. If you decide to offer our products and programs to your patients it is imperative that the therapist swallows his or her pride. Some therapists will not request tech support from us because they are embarrassed or afraid to ask for help. The key is to remember that it is not about the therapist, it is about the patient. The therapists that feel comfortable with accepting our help will do really well with our program.

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