

Finding Time: *The Story of Metodika*



Gustaf Horwitz—founder and CEO, Metodika

I got the idea to create Metodika EPM, Metodika's exclusive healthcare practice management system, nearly three decades ago.

It was 1986. My mother had just been diagnosed with breast cancer. I was only 25, but I went with her from doctor to doctor, sitting with her as she underwent batteries of tests. I was there as she endured invasive surgeries and agonizing recoveries. As she learned that she had been misdiagnosed. That her tumor had originated in the spine and had already lodged deep in her brain. I was also with her when she got reassuring news from her doctor that everyone knew to be false.

And I wondered, who was looking after her humanity? Who considered her dignity? Why didn't anyone coordinate her care? How was she, in such a weakened state, supposed to be the liaison among a slew of healthcare providers who didn't talk to each other? Why wasn't anybody mindful of the patient experience—the experience of my mother—as they were trying to save her life?

Years later I found myself consulting with the Board of Medicine in Stockholm, overseeing management of Sweden's massive public healthcare system.

From that vantage point, I saw the business side of this inefficiency and lack of coordination. Nothing appeared to be working. Surely there must be a better way.

As luck would have it, I was not the only one with this perspective. A year later I was at a cocktail party, conversing with world-renowned plastic surgeon, Dr. Per Hedén. We were talking about inefficiency in medicine—how so much time was wasted, devoted to unproductive tasks.

Dr. Hedén was a different kind of doctor. He was driven by passion. He funded his own research. He wanted to understand how to help his patients heal more quickly. To make the best and most efficient use of his resources so he could help more people. He wanted to reduce complications, reduce surprises, and preside over first-rate patient outcomes.

To Dr. Heden, who would later become a close friend and business partner, the challenge was not in recruiting patients; it was in managing and serving the patients he had. He could not see a way forward.

No way forward? To me that sounded like a challenge rather than a problem.

We resolved to find a better way. During our weekly meetings over the next year and a half, Dr. Hedén and I recognized that there was a structural problem in the healthcare industry. Doctors spent too little time doing what they did best—taking care of patients. Instead, they spent valuable time doing other people's jobs or working on administrative tasks like filing, scheduling, and moving paper. Couldn't typewriters be replaced by computers? Paper records upgraded to digital fill-in forms? Couldn't scheduling be done electronically, rather than flipping through piles of appointment books? Why not enable office managers to efficiently cross-reference the availability of surgeons, exam rooms, surgeries, and specialized equipment?

With all these innovations in mind, we found it possible to save time all over the clinic. Time that was best spent treating patients.

Our frequent meetings and numerous workshops would lead to an iterative, functional design process. Beginning with a clearly articulated view of the problem, we developed a software solution from the ground up. We didn't even write our first line of code until we had developed the entire program architecture on paper. That's the right way to do it. But it's rare for anyone to take that kind of time these days. Our focus was on small-to-mid-sized healthcare practices. We knew we could revolutionize their efficiency and patient satisfaction in one go. Thus Metodika EPM was born.

But birth is just the beginning. We knew what we needed to do, and we had a program that did it. The next step was continuing the iterative process, now with real clinics, closely monitoring what we had built and improving it every step of the way. In hindsight this was a key to the success of Metodika.

Not only did we get instant feedback from the users of the system, but they also learned by doing. Twenty years later, this iterative development process, now known as "agile development," has become the industry standard for software development. Back in the 90's, we didn't have fancy words to describe what we were doing. We just thought it made sense.

That's what I'm most proud of about Metodika: We do things in smart ways, and we do them in partnership with our clients.