



For Immediate Release

Contact: [Colleen Reynolds](#) | Media Relations Coordinator | (309) 825-7255

OSF Ventures Invests in Device to Better Detect Middle Ear Infections

(September 16, 2020| PEORIA, Illinois)-Middle ear infections are the leading cause of hearing loss, surgery and antibiotic use, especially in children who are misdiagnosed up to half of the time using the current technology. Knowing there is a need for better tools to diagnose and treat ear infections, [OSF Ventures](#) is joining a \$5.2 million Series A investment in Champaign, Illinois based PhotoniCare Inc. and its [TOMi™ Scope](#) for non-invasive imaging of the middle ear.

Three other venture capital firms joined OSF Ventures in the investment round including i2E Ventures, Sony Corporation of America and Dreamapact Ventures. The money will be used for further development of AI technology, and to ramp up sales, customer support, and provider reimbursement.

PhotoniCare recently received Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval for the *TOMi* hand-held medical device. Since 2013, the medical device start-up has been developing technology invented at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign by the company's founders. Its new imager uses a novel application of light wave technology known as Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT).

The hand-held device allows physicians, for the first time, to directly visualize fluid in the middle ear where ear infections reside. What's most impressive – the imager works even in the presence of wax – providing objective data for a diagnosis and treatment course. Clinicians who have used the imager say it will revolutionize diagnosis and treatment of inner ear infections.

“Ear pain and concerns about hearing are one of the most common reasons parents take their children to the doctor. But, for decades, until now, technology to see inside the ear canal has not improved,” according to Mayank Taneja, Director of Venture Investments, OSF Ventures. He added, “Surgery and antibiotics are not always needed and we’re excited the *TOMi Scope* could reduce unnecessary care and costs for patients and families.” Taneja points out the investment also fits with OSF Ventures’ priorities of improving patient outcomes, enhancing patient experience and reducing the cost of health care.

Children can suffer from recurring ear infections for six to 12 months before they are referred to an ENT specialist, and are often prescribed increasingly potent antibiotics during this time. More than one million tube surgeries to reduce fluid and pressure in the inner ear are performed in the US alone every year.

Melinda Cooling, OSF Vice President Advance Practice Providers/Chief Clinician Executive Saint Gabriel Digital Health said OSF HealthCare will pilot the digitally enhanced otoscope at a few of its [OSF Urgo](#) urgent care locations to evaluate the equipment and workflow.

“This could be a game changer in improving our diagnosis and treatment so we’re excited to partner with PhotoniCare,” Cooling said. “The device also has a video screen and can connect to other devices for easy viewing that will let providers visually show patients and parents of small children the extent of the problem and provide education about the best remedies.”

PhotoniCare co-founder & CEO Ryan Shelton is equally excited by the support from OSF HealthCare.

“At PhotoniCare we set out to solve the massive problem of frequent misdiagnosis of middle ear infections, and the overuse of antibiotics and referrals to surgery in children” said Shelton. “We are excited to have the support of OSF Ventures which has a reputation for successful investments and we appreciate the partnership that will pilot use of the *TOMi Scope* which will provide us with valuable feedback.”

OSF HealthCare is an integrated health system owned and operated by [The Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis](#), Peoria, Illinois. OSF HealthCare employs more than 23,600 Mission Partners in 147 locations, including 14 hospitals – 10 acute care, four critical access – with 2,097 licensed beds, and 2 colleges of nursing throughout Illinois and Michigan. The OSF HealthCare physician network employs more than 1,500 primary care, specialists and advanced practice providers, who are part of the [OSF Medical Group](#). OSF HealthCare, through [OSF Home Care Services](#), operates an extensive network of home health and hospice services. It also owns Pointcore Inc., comprised of health care-related businesses and [OSF HealthCare Foundation](#), the philanthropic arm for the organization.

OSF Ventures specializes in venture optimization, partnering financially and operationally in companies that improve patient outcomes and reduce costs to health care systems. OSF Ventures is a division of OSF HealthCare. More at www.osfventures.org.

Photonicare-Funded in 2013, PhotoniCare's mission is to revolutionize healthcare by providing physicians with better diagnostic tools, starting with the *TOMi* Scope the first and only otoscope to provide non-invasive imaging of the middle ear using a novel application of Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) to directly visualize and characterize fluid in the middle ear, a necessity for the diagnosis of middle ear infections. PhotoniCare has developed a patented imaging platform technology that provides growth opportunities beyond otology (study of the ear). Peer-reviewed studies show that the same handheld OCT technology can be used to image other areas, such as the anterior and posterior segments of the eye, the skin, and in the mouth.

PhotoniCare has received more than \$6 million in support from the National Institutes of Health, most recently a Phase SBIR II award for work in artificial intelligence. In addition to numerous awards for innovation and entrepreneurship, in 2015, PhotoniCare was the winner of a grant from the National Capital Consortium for Pediatric Device Innovation (NCC-PDI), an FDA-funded consortium led by Children's National Hospital. More at www.photoni.care.com