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Intro: The Medical Board of California is committed to consumer protection through the licensing and regulation of doctors and certain allied health care professionals.

CV: My name is Carlos Villatoro and this is Medical Board Chat; the official podcast of the Medical Board of California. Here at the Medical Board of California there's a sense of excitement in the air with the launch of the Board's new app for Apple iOS devices. The app is a powerful new tool that consumers can use to make better informed decisions about their doctors. Here to talk to us about the app is the Board's ISB manager, Sean Eichelkraut. Sean, welcome to Medical Board Chat.

SE: Thank you, Carlos.

CV: To kick it off Sean tell me just a little bit about your background. How long have you been with the Board, tell us a little bit about your interest in developing apps.

SE: I started with the Medical Board of California in January of 2008, after working for the Department of Consumer Affairs for approximately three years as a programmer there. Spent a lot of time programming here and about three years ago took over the position of the manager of the Information System Branch. I've been programming since high school it's always what I knew I wanted to do. Graduated from Sac State with a degree in Bachelors of Science in computer science in May of 2004 and worked in the private sector for a while and then switched over to State. Been loving it ever since.

CV: Never looked back huh?

SE: Yeah.

CV: Well that's great. So how did you come up with the idea for the app and what did it take for you to get the ball rolling?

SE: So, the app is actually something we've thought about doing for a long time. It's always been an idea of ours to try to figure out how we can get the information out to consumers as quickly and easily as possible and we've always had ways where email blasts go out, and just generic broad information to people, but never tailored to exactly what they wanted. The BreEze system came along and had a interface in it where you could actually go and subscribe in for notifications when a licensee you were interested in had a status update, but it was a very basic, it only told you certain things about their status when their status changed. It didn't cover everything we wanted to cover. And it required people to go register for BreEze, know how BreEze worked, check back on BreEze quite a bit.

CV: So, it's a little bit challenging for someone.

SE: Yeah, just not as efficient as it could be. And so Frank Eslami, the developer that actually wrote the code for the app, enjoys doing iOS programming in his free time and so he came to me and said 'Hey, yeah you know I've got this skill, I'd like to see if there's a way we could put it to use here for the Board,' and I said, 'You know what? The Department of Consumer Affairs just launched their new DCA search application.' That kind of gave us the last pieces we needed to put this all together. And what that did

was it allowed us to get the data programmatically to use in the app from the license lookup service and then it also allows what are called permalinks in the web, on the web, that you can basically have a link that'll take you back to a person's profile without having to research all of their information, putting in their name or their license number again to find their profile. So, the combination of those two things, along with all the content we had on our website, it really meant the app was just putting all that together. Like a big mashup of how everything could be stored. And so now you don't have to register for BreEze. You have the app on your phone.

CV: That's great.

SE: And you just plug in the data and it's there.

CV: So what can, let's talk about some of the features what can consumers do with this app?

SE: So the main feature of the app is that you can follow a licensee that you're interested in. So it could be your primary care physician, it could be your child's primary care physician and, any doctor you're seeing basically that's licensed by the Medical Board of California. You go in there and you find their license one time by searching for them. You say 'Okay. I want to follow this individual.' By adding them to your following list, then, you can come back and you can go right to their profile anytime you want without having to search for them again. It's like akin to having a favorite on your, on your browser.

CV: So with one click you can just go into that physician's profile.

SE: Go right back.

CV: And see what's going on.

SE: Yeah, so it's just instant you can look at it any time. It saves people that searching. But the real killer feature of the app is that you don't even have to go check it that often. As long as you leave the app running on your phone it will do what's called a background fetch and go out and retrieve data from the DCA search interface and check to see if anything's changed. So, if their status changes, their expiration date changes, their address changes, any disciplinary action or public record action information is put on their record, if they update their survey, say, with a new board certification, or anything like that, if they change their name, if they get married or anything like that, any change detected in their profile will actually pop up a notification on your phone and tell you, you know, license so-and-so has been updated and you just click on that notification and it just opens the app for you; takes you right to their profile and you can review the changes right then in there for yourself.

CV: So, if I'm following a doctor using the app and I had the app running in my background and what you mean by that is the app must be opened for you to receive a notification is that correct?

SE: Correct.

CV: So, if I have the app running in the background and for example my doctor is disciplined by the Medical Board, I can actually get an alert on my phone that will let me know that he has been disciplined?

SE: Correct. As soon as we would post that information to our website and through the DCA search license lookup the phone basically decides on its own based on how much power it has and your own usage when to optimistically go out and check that information. So it does it about every eight hours depending on how often you use your phone. Maybe you only do it twice a day. More heavy phone users, it'll do it more often because it just knows you use your phone.

CV: I'm definitely one of those.

SE: Mine it will pop up, yeah, at least three times a day. We try to set a minimum to have a check every eight hours but again the phone decides when it wants to do it. We just, we know it'll do it at least once or twice a day and when it detects that change it'll pop up that notification and tell you.

CV: Now what happens if the app isn't running in the background and I opened it up fresh?

SE: So, every time you open the app up it will go out and do the same check. So, whether it's the app is closed and you're starting it up or whether it was just in the background and now you're bringing it to the foreground you're bringing it back up, you know to look at it; if it's been more than 15 minutes since its last check the status, it'll go out and check it again. So if you're on the way to a doctor's appointment even, you open it up and boom! It's gonna tell you if there was any sort of update there.

CV: Wow that's such a great feature. So speaking of features what feature would you say that you are the most proud of?

SE: Definitely that notification feature, you know, to make things easier and more efficient for consumers to be able to go out and check that information not put the burden on them to have to go out and research it again. You can be, while you're on the phone making an appointment with your doctor you can pull the app out and look at it you know it's just. I really like the idea of automating things and making things more efficient and so when we could find the power of the phones that we're all carry nowadays along with these new web services it made it really simple.

CV: Well, that is excellent. So what are the requirements? Do I need a new iPhone? Where do I find the app and how do I download it?

SE: So, you don't need a new iPhone. You do need to be running the most recent version of the iOS software though. And so iOS is the operating system that runs on iPhones and iPads. But any device back to the iPhone 5s which was launched in September of 2013 and forward can run the application. And then iPads back to the iPad air or Mini 2 that were also launched in November of 2013 can run it as well. So you know we got five years of phones out there. I personally run it on iPhone 6 and you know it runs fine. As long as you have kept up-to-date on your software updates it will run fine which of course we all do nowadays you know for security purposes and stuff.

So, you can go out and download it from the App Store. You search for Medical Board of California. Medical Board of California physician search and it will pop right up. You download it, it's a very small install it won't take up a lot of room on your phone. You're able to save on up to 16 licensees in there and following those 16 licenses won't take up hardly any room on your phone.

CV: And how much is it?

SE: Oh, it's absolutely free.

CV: Well that's great. I'm sure everyone will love that part.

SE: We're looking for as many people to install it as possible.

CV: What type of feedback have you received so far on the app?

SE: All the feedback so far has been very positive. The testing we've been doing, people are, you know, very happy with the way the license alerts come in and stuff like that. The idea of people being able to be notified just about the doctors that they're interested in and get those updates in a timely manner and you know they're very excited about. A lot of the demonstrations and presentations we've done you know people have been very interested in. So we're really excited to get this installed and get as much feedback as we can from you know real-world users.

CV: Well, excellent. I can tell you during our annual Legislative Day at the State Capitol, our staff showed it to state legislators and they were all very receptive and very excited about the app and a few of them offered to help us promote it. So if any legislators are listening out there, we will take you up on that offer. So the app allows its users to follow different doctors. How many doctors can you follow on the app and are there any customizable features?

SE: Yes. So, currently we are allowing for up to 16 licensees to be saved into the following list. So you basically go and you search for licensee and then once you say you want to follow that licensee you're prompted to give a descriptive name for that licensee that's just for you. So you can put in there that it's your daughter's pediatrician or, you know, your parents cardiologists or your own, you know, doctor. Your own primary care physician and stuff like that. So you can go in there and label them and that way when you get these notifications, you know exactly who it is and then who to tell, maybe.

CV: And are you able to remove doctors from that list once you, then make a decision about them that you don't want to continue seeing them?

SE: Yes the 16, the list of 16, is you know completely editable. You can add, remove, rename, you know, as many as you need to have. So if, you know, you're seeing a couple doctors and you stop seeing them you just delete them out of the app and add your new doctors in.

CV: So, Sean why is this app different than just pulling up the website on the browser in your phone?

SE: So, in addition to being able to have that following list of the doctors that you want to get the regular notifications on, it also tailors our website and refactors it in a way that's mobile-friendly. Even more mobile-friendly than just our responsive website alone. So it strips out the header information, really just pulls out just the data and puts it in there with a nice tabbed layout that you can, you know, follow through. So if you're used to our website it looks very much like our website. But again, we pull out a lot of the header and design information that allows you just to get right to the content and have that content available and to pull up on your phone at any time. So it's like a specialized version of our website for the mobile view.

CV: Don't forget to download the app by visiting the App Store and searching for Medical Board of California. And that's gonna do it for Medical Board chat. Don't forget to follow us on Twitter like us on Facebook, and subscribe to our YouTube channel. Protecting consumers by advancing high quality safe medical care. Thank you, Sean.

SE: Thank you, Carlos.

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