

From Omaha to the ICU: How NIH Helped Empower Family Caregivers

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For many, the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) is a place of isolation. Family caregivers often find themselves standing behind a glass wall, feeling sidelined as they watch a harrowing situation unfold, unsure how to help. Amid the chaos of beeping alarms and busy staff, they want to advocate for their loved ones but lack the knowledge to do so effectively.

With more than a decade of experience as a critical care nurse, Breanna Hetland, PhD, RN, CCRN, witnessed firsthand the confusion and emotional strain families face when navigating the complexity of decision-making and care coordination. The issue became personal during her own family's medical crisis, reinforcing the urgent need for better tools to support patients and caregivers. In 2023, Dr. Hetland partnered with co-founder Greg Nelson to achieve a shared goal: using technology to give families clarity, guidance, and confidence during the hospital experience. Together, they founded Nebraska-based Family Room, LLC (formerly Silicon Cures, LLC).

Determined to eliminate the helplessness families often feel in the ICU, Family Room developed Familyroom.health, a digital health platform that provides caregivers with tailored education and decision-support tools. Integrated seamlessly with hospital electronic health record systems, the platform empowers family members to participate more effectively, transforming them from overwhelmed bystanders into informed, confident partners in care.

“ NIH funding helped Family Room transform its lived experiences into a platform that hospitals are now purchasing. We're not just conducting research anymore; we're making a real difference for families. ”

Thanks to a National Institutes of Health (NIH) Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) award from the National Institute for Nursing Research (NINR), Family Room, in collaboration with the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC), was able to refine and enhance its mobile health technology with evidence-based assessments, bilingual capabilities, comprehensive educational resources, and interactive engagement tools that bridge the gap between families and clinical care providers.

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State-District

NE - 2

Technology

Digital Health

Primary Institute

Nursing Research
(NINR)

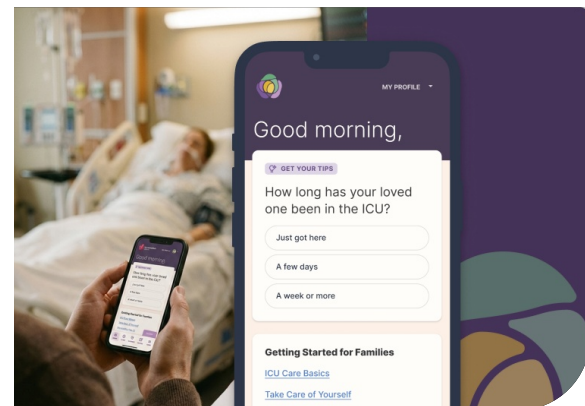
Project Details from NIH RePORTER

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Phase I funding helped the company remove a major barrier to caregiver engagement by recognizing families' observations and care activities in the official medical record. This milestone was achieved with the platform's full integration with Epic, an electronic health record (EHR) system utilized by over 30% of U.S. hospitals. Suddenly, a family caregiver's input became actionable data, making their role in comfort care visible and valuable. This breakthrough further validated the Familyroom.health technology. Family Room established Nebraska Medicine as its flagship partner and built credibility with hospitals, thereby strengthening its competitive position and opening doors to commercial partnerships with major health systems nationwide.

NIH support helped Family Room secure over \$650,000 in additional non-dilutive grants, positioning the company strongly for Phase II funding and multiplying the impact of the original investment. NIH funding validated the Family Room mission at a critical moment and provided resources to prove that the technology could work in real hospital settings.

NIH funding was the catalyst that transformed Familyroom.health from a research concept into a commercial reality, setting the technical foundation to scale and impact millions of ICU families across the nation.

