

Cartier

WOMEN'S INITIATIVE AWARDS



2017 FINALIST FOR EUROPE

CIARA DONLON

Ireland

THEYA Healthcare

WWW.THEYAHEALTHCARE.COM

Designs, manufactures and sells a range of post-surgery lingerie for women

Breast cancer is the most common cancer amongst women worldwide, with nearly 1.7 million new cases diagnosed in each year (Source: World Cancer Research Fund, 2016). Major advances in treatment mean that breast cancer survival is increasingly likely; however for women who have been through this ordeal, there are many major lifestyle changes that need to be made that are not often considered by lingerie manufacturers.

Seeing the distress this caused when breast cancer survivors came into 40-year-old Ciara Donlon's Dublin-based lingerie shop, she decided to explore the market to see if she could create a product



that put the survivor's needs first. Existing bras were either ugly, bulky, bland colours or entirely over-the-top. Most were designed to keep prostheses for breast cancer survivors in place, without much thought about what women actually wanted to wear or how it made her feel.

Breast cancer was particularly close to Ciara's heart as her grandmother Rose, the inspiration behind her company's wild rose logo, underwent a double mastectomy during breast cancer treatment. After securing a grant from Enterprise Ireland's first Female Feasibility Fund, Ciara was able to complete market research with 80 breast cancer survivors in Ireland and the UK, giving proof that there was demand for her concept. THEYA Healthcare was born, named after the Hindu Goddess, to reflect the strength of breast cancer survivors.

“When we ran the pilot it was a game changer for me. Women were so amazed by our products. That's when I realized we were really making a difference for them”

Further investment from Enterprise Ireland's Competitive Start Fund allowed Ciara to work fulltime on THEYA Healthcare, teaming up with experienced lingerie designer Kelly Lakin. THEYA Healthcare now designs and manufactures garments that promote healing, offer exceptional comfort and functionality whilst looking beautiful.

Originally starting as a breast cancer-only brand, after speaking to medical professionals Ciara realised the lingerie could aid patients recovering from surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy. The post-operative underwear is also suitable for sufferers of skin conditions and sensory disorders.

Ongoing feedback from patients and medical professionals has formed the foundation of the company's product development and based on customer feedback, a second range of white products was launched in February 2016. It includes a zip front fastening bra made specifically for the cosmetic surgery market and to help women receiving chemotherapy whose fingertips have gone numb.

THEYA Healthcare started trading in February 2015 and already has 37 stockists in five countries. Classed as a medical device manufacturer, THEYA has primarily targeted the medical industry and large pharmacy chains.

THE BAMBOO FABRIC

THEYA Healthcare products are made from a unique blend of environmentally friendly bamboo fabric (OEKO-TEX®), it can be regrown in one year, requires no chemical pesticides or synthetic fertilizers and uses a third of the water required to grow cotton.

The benefits of bamboo go beyond environmental; it offers proven anti-bacterial protection against commonly found surgical site infections. A recently commissioned clinical study into the physical and mental wellbeing of patients in their first month post-surgery by University College Dublin's School of Biomedical Engineering included THEYA's products.

The results were staggering. The material was 97% resistant to gram negative bacteria as well as 92% resistant to gram positive bacteria. The material was 59% more absorbent than 100% cotton and had 17% better horizontal wicking than 100% cotton. Horizontal wicking is crucial in creating these bras especially to women during breast cancer treatment as they may suffer hot flushes and excessive perspiration.

“There was very little thought put into women who would be wearing a post-surgery bra and how they would feel in it. That was my inspiration to make a change”

A HUG IN THE BRA

By simply listening to her target market, Ciara Donlon has developed a range of products which help women heal both physically and psychologically.

“We get emails and phone calls from women that say it really changed their lives. One lady didn’t have the self-confidence to go out her front door but said that our bras helped her to get back up on her feet after her surgery. The ‘hug in the bra’ has been a common theme that we’ve heard.”

THEYA Healthcare has already helped thousands of women with its innovative products, and with plans in place to push into further markets, including supply post-operative underwear to British and French healthboards, the incredible impact of this company will be felt for many years to come.