

Start something new



India is on the cusp of change. The whole country is reverberating with a patriotic note of “Make in India” as a motto and a slogan that is sung far and wide representing the mood in many industries today. This raises several questions as to why we always rely and swear by international products. Are we inferior in any way in creating ideas or is there a lack of knowledge and opportunities? It’s time to sit back and think.

As an entrepreneur looking for opportunities, when we look at the health care space, and especially the dental industry, the only things that we seem to export to the world is dental stone and plaster other than Dentists themselves. Introspection in this aspect is necessary as we are one of the largest nations in terms of dental manpower. There is much research going on in more than 200 prosthodontic departments around the country that deliver postgraduate education; yet, there are no serious innovations in the field of prosthodontics. Most often a dissertation is chosen with very little thought directed toward translation of research into applications, making dissertations a mere formality to appear for university exams.

A SWOT analysis of the entire issue can identify that our Strengths lie in manpower and clinical material while our weakness is lack of innovation, organization, and focus on market. Our opportunity is this virgin area where Indian companies are nonexistent. Our threats are mostly internal due to our inferiority complex.

In the west, every professor is working in tandem with the industry to conduct research. The collaboration between industry and university is so strong that the industry converts every bright concept into a product. This is possible only because the industry has total confidence in the academicians.

Most product innovation originates from collaborative thinking involving different faculties. It is imperative to have scientists and engineers engaged in focused group discussion on product innovation. Every department should have a core area of research and a road map to convert the findings into a product. Multiple aspects of the same problem should be taken up as small studies and dissertations for different postgraduates, culminating into funding, product launch, and knowledge transfer or establishing supply chain to market the product. This is a sustainable model for any department, which then need not depend on the number of admissions.

In Silicon Valley, every individual is thinking of only one thing, i.e., how to innovate and patent that will make him a millionaire. Product innovation begins with the identification of a problem. As clinicians, many times we recognise a problem but it is beyond our scope to envisage a solution because we lack the domain expertise for technological issues. This can be complimented by having engineers, scientists, and other technology experts to achieve optimum solutions.

As a society, we should motivate our teachers to train in the finer aspects of product innovation by creating opportunities, be it technological or commercial. We should identify centres of excellence that will look into one focused aspect of the problem. Many research institutes in India possess the infrastructure and the funds to undertake high end work. If there is proof of concept in the project, then investors like Angels or Venture Capitalists can be approached to fund the entire project. In other industries, we are looking at incubators and accelerators that will hand hold any start up project and make it see the light of the day.

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Currently, the start-up ecosystem in India is very bright. Many investors have entered the country with new hope. The potential to utilize this opportunity is huge as we have enough dental manpower and clinical material. Every dental college should insist on consistent translational research, which will lead to product innovation. As long as we can provide quality and affordability with our own products, there is pride in using our own products.

This editorial may sound very materialistic as it talks about the commercial aspects of academics; however, it is not always about money but about the joy of starting something new...

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