

Experiences from refinements of medical and technical research results at Umeå University into commercial products for the health care market

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Abstract: A working method for refining medical and technical research results into biomedical products for the health care market is described. The application of the working method at Umeå University resulted in 40 identified projects since 1993 that have been business developed. So far, one Biomedical company and several license agreements/patent applications have been the result of the business development. It is concluded that personal networks and international perspectives are important tools for success.

INTRODUCTION

Uminova Center (The Industrial and Community Liaison Office of Umeå University) works to refine the results of university research into commercialised products. For example, Uminova Center, can analyse the market and the competitors, apply for patents, produce pamphlets, draw up business plans and budgets etc.. Often the originator of an idea, usually scientists or lecturers, has no commercial experience, in which case Uminova Center can help them to find an appropriate firm or business collaborator [1].

In 1993 NUTEK (The Swedish National Board of Industrial and Technical Development) started up a National programme with a special aim to commercialise medical and technical research results for the health care industry in Sweden. This programme was called PUFFA and Uminova Center holds the project co-ordinator for PUFFA in Umeå. PUFFA is also engaged in the universities at Stockholm, Linköping, Lund and Göteborg. PUFFA aims at working in the pre-commercial phase and to prepare the projects for other financiers, firms etc. to take over the projects so that they will reach the market as soon as possible.

METHOD

PUFFA's work at Umeå involves primarily the following steps: Identification of key-persons in medical and technical research at Umeå university; market PUFFA via visits at scientific department; follow up dissertations, seminars etc. that can give information on new research with commercial potential; evaluation of commercial potential (market, patent), prepare identified projects for market introduction and finally find a business partner, entrepreneur, company etc., that can take over the product.

Seed money is provided by the PUFFA programme for the different business development steps like patent application etc. No more than 50 000 SEK may be put in to a project by the co-ordinator.

The PUFFA programme has a National Board of supervisors, put together by NUTEK, that can support the

co-ordinators with business evaluation and also with further financing of the identified projects.

RESULTS

The work involves a large personal engagement from the project co-ordinator that usually has to become a "shadow-entrepreneur" for the business development of the project. Thus, only about 6-7 projects can be active at the same time for the project co-ordinator.

Usually the process to take a research result to market success takes >3 years. In Umeå about 40 research results have been identified within the PUFFA programme since 1993. Out of these 40, one project has become a company that had a million turn-over during 1995, 6 patent applications have been filed, 2 license agreements have been signed with the industry and 8 projects are still in an active business development phase close to licensing or company. About 30 of the projects have, after refinement, either been helped to get contact with other business development organisations or have been converted back to research or further development before business development. A minority have also been cancelled because of different failures to reach the market.

CONCLUSIONS

Prerequisites at Umeå University for good results with business development of research results for the health care industry have been:

1. A good network with scientists and lecturers inside the university and acceptance of the concept from the scientific society.
2. Farsightedness and patience to work hard with the projects and to use the "ring-on-water" effect to reach the market.
3. To always look at the potential market in an international perspective.
4. To have a good network of consultants for pre-commercial analysis.
5. To have a good network in Medical industry.

REFERENCES

- [1] O. Lindahl, "Collaboration in marketing new inventions at Umeå," *Clinical Engineering Update*, p. 7, 1990.