The Edge: Medical products from patients’ needs

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My husband and I recently returned from an amazing trip to Lisbon, Portugal, where I, or rather my product, The Shower Shirt, won an International Patient Innovation Award from Catolica’- Lisbon School of Business and Economics.

I had been contacted by the university in March announcing I was an award recipient in the “Patient Innovation” category. Excited by the accolade, I began researching the Patient Innovation Program. I was pleasantly surprised by the international collaboration among the Patient Innovation Advisory Board, including two Nobel Laureates, researchers and faculty members from around the world.

I soon realized the focus of the Patient Innovation program was not just to recognize innovators and their products, but to actually empower creative ideas for furthering patient care and treatment.

In the first 16 months, the Patient Innovation platform collected and curated 300 innovative treatments developed by patients and caregivers from 30 countries, with leading innovations from the United States, Portugal, England, Australia and Brazil.
Patient Innovation advisory board member and MIT Professor Dr. Eric Von Hippel said, “Patients develop innovations based upon deep understanding of their own needs and often very different from innovations developed by companies in the healthcare industry. Yet, as our research has shown, innovations developed by patients can greatly increase their quality of life.”

This was true for my work with The Shower Shirt, which was derived from a personal need, but created to enhance the “quality of life” of future breast cancer patients requiring protection when showering after mastectomy surgery. There are many examples of this type of innovation.

Collaborator Innovation winner Ivan Owen, a Seattle puppeteer recently featured in the New York Times for utilizing 3D printers to create low-cost hand prosthetics, shared his 3D printing “how to” files online as ‘public domain” so others could freely create these devices.

Patient Innovation winner and England resident Tal Golesworthy was advised he needed surgery to repair his aorta caused by Marfans Syndrome. His engineering background helped develop the Personalized Aortic Root Support for cardiac surgery. Tal’s creation has been used in Europe for a decade and under research in the United States.

Caregiver Innovation winner and Israel resident Debbie Elnatan’s son was born with cerebral palsy and unable to walk. She developed a sling-like device allowing him to “walk” while strapped to her. Debbie’s patented invention is being distributed internationally at www.fireflyfriends.com/upsee.

Caregiver Innovation winner and Lisbon resident Juancina Teixeira’s son had Angelman Syndrome and refused to stand or walk. Her son’s fascination with helium balloons led her to fill her home with balloons, prompting her son to grab for them; nearly six years later, he walks without assistance.

Patient Innovation winner Louis Plante, a Canadian resident with cystic fibrosis, grew tired of the constant need for chest clapping to loosen secretions. Using his background in electronics and music, Louis developed the Frequencer, a device that uses sound waves to loosen chest secretions. Louis’ information can be found at www.dymedso.com.

The team of Innovation winners obviously had one goal in common: create solutions to problems endured as patients or caregivers, and subsequently support other with those same problems. It’s an approach which, as Dr. Von Hippel stated, is “very different from innovations developed by companies in the healthcare industry.” Why? These Innovators weren’t focused on corporate research, target markets or profits, but only the pure desire to enhance the quality of life for themselves and others.

Lisa Crites is the inventor of The Shower Shirt, the first and only patented water-resistant garment to protect chest surgery patients while showering after surgery.
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