

# Linking health tech researchers with the industry

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From the time an academic paper is published about a medical discovery, it can take 10 years or more for it to be translated into a commercially available product.

To accelerate the process of turning a medical discovery, for example, into a novel piece of health technology, the National Research Foundation on Monday launched the new national Health Technologies Consortium (HealthTEC). The consortium will matchmake industry partners with academics at research institutes and institutions of higher learning.

It will be housed at the Institute of Health Innovation and Technology (iHealthtech) at the National University of Singapore.

Professor Lim Chwee Teck, who is the director of iHealthtech, said some researchers see research papers and not commercial products as their “deliverables”. But society can benefit from the experts working on the discovery.

“Our ultimate aim is to capture value through faster translation of research outputs into benefits for patients and society as well,” said Prof Lim, who is also the director of the consortium.

He added that the consortium will focus its efforts on health-sensing technologies such as tactile sensors and molecular diagnostics, as well as health analytics and artificial intelligence.

Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, chief health scientist at the Ministry of Health and executive director of the ministry’s Office for Healthcare Transformation, was the guest of honour at the launch.

He said: “By bringing together researchers across many disciplines and institutions, HealthTEC can actively contribute to the creation of a vibrant and exciting community of researchers and innovators who each bring their particular skills towards developing novel solutions to critical challenges.”

The consortium will facilitate interactions between members at networking sessions, workshops, discussions and symposiums.

Companies that join the consortium as members will be able to access the latest research in fields such as bioelectronics, biomimetic materials (materials that mimic the properties of natural materials like spider silk and shark skin), robotics and smart sensors.

Members can also receive seed funding from the consortium to help kick-start collaboration projects.

Four companies have already joined as founding industry members: Singapore Technologies (ST) Engineering, Ferrero Asia Pacific, Tip Biosystems and Roco Technology.

Dr Yap Hong Kai, chief technology officer at Roco, said the consortium would make the process of taking a discovery into the market easier for aspiring entrepreneurs, including graduate students and researchers.

Dr Yap was part of a team that invented a soft robotic glove to help stroke patients regain their grip strength during physical rehabilitation. But he had no business experience and did not know how to turn the team’s research into a marketable product. It took him some time before he co-founded Roco.

The invention, called EsoGlove, has already been sold to a hospital in the United States and Roco is now working with the National University Hospital and Tan Tock Seng Hospital to run clinical trials here, Dr Yap said.

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