Future positives

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EDITORIAL

One of the reassuring and invigorating aspects of life is its ability to carry on. No matter how gloomy the outlook might seem, how negative all those around you choose to be or how downbeat the immediate prospects, there will always be someone cheery and positive who comes up with at the least a wry smile and at the most a great idea.

We are a profession of 'good ideas' people largely because we are problem solvers by nature. Rolling up our metaphorical sleeves and getting on with the job is part of what we do, and what we do well. However, it is the ideas part of our character that is about to be given a new and exciting opportunity. The chances are that we have all had good ideas, especially in the field of clinical dentistry or patient care, on which we have never been able follow up. This may have been due to time constraints or the lack of knowledge of how to take it further, who to talk to, where to raise the money needed to get it developed, or even started in the first place. In short, what do you do next?

I remember being struck by the story of post-it notes described by a keynote speaker at a BDA Conference some years back. Seemingly an ardent church-goer had had the idea for a form of 'marker' that stuck well enough inside his hymn book to stay put but not so well as to damage the flimsy pages when removed. Ironically it needed the development of what no one had tried to invent before, a glue that didn't stick well. Such a simple idea but such a world changing result. First though, the inventor needed to communicate his good idea.

The popularity of television programmes involving entrepreneurs in particular and the world of business in general, such as *Dragon's Den* and *The Apprentice*, tap into an underlying fascination not only with making money and becoming a tycoon but also with the process of turning good ideas into reality. Dentistry is not only not immune from this, it is positively involved as the business model of practice evolves in a climate of falling disease levels, greater consumer influence and a wider variety of opportunities to be innovative than ever before.

The role of any good organisation is to provide current support, which the BDA is demonstrably achieving for our members, but also to look ahead. Planning is one element, predicting is another but promotion is a very important third factor. In this connection the BDA is helping to promote the Dental & Oral Health Innovation Awards, which is part of the

Medical Futures initiative (www.medicalfutures.co.uk). Further details are available on page 585 and also in the insert with this issue.

MORE AWARDS

So, do we really need *another* set of awards? In this case, yes we do because the whole premise of these awards is quite different. Rather than recognising good deeds, excellence in clinical, practice or service contexts these awards are essentially the Dragon's Den of Dentistry. Winners will gain unparalleled validation and endorsement of their idea and also stand the chance to raise funding as well as enter into dialogue with investors and industry on a whole new level.

The unique model behind the innovation is Medical Futures, which aims to harness, develop and commercialise medical, dental and healthcare ideas, whilst ensuring the interests and intellectual property of the innovator are protected. Medical Futures was founded in 2001 by practising NHS clinicians, frustrated at seeing their own and a wealth of their colleagues' ideas fail to get off the drawing board. Their belief was that no one was better placed to suggest improvements to patient care than those individuals who deliver it.

Indeed, research revealed that of the top money grossing innovations over the last 50 years to have stemmed from doctors, all of them had lagged inside the inventor's mind for up to 15 years before they began the road to implementation. If this sounds familiar then clearly the Awards are something to investigate further, as is the Dental & Oral Health i2 Event to be held in London 7 July 2008, at which there will be the opportunity to make connections, catalyse ideas and help solve unmet needs in dental care.

Whether this first year of the Awards will discover the dental equivalent of the post-it note or whether the inventor of that innovation will still have it bouncing around in her or his head for a further few years we will have to wait and see. What we will know sooner is the realisation of some of the ideas that you have had and which will, hopefully begin their journey to the surgery of each and everyone of us with the first expression of interest in this new venture.

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