



SPECIAL ARTICLE

Innovation and technology transfer in the health sciences: A cross-sectional perspective[☆]



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Abstract This article is based on the strategic reflection and discussion that took place on the occasion of the first conference on innovation and technology transfer in the health sciences organized by the REGIC-ENS-FENIN-SEMICYUC and held in Madrid in the Instituto de Salud Carlos III on May 7th, 2013, with the aim of promoting the transfer of technological innovation in medicine and health care beyond the European program “Horizon 2020”. The presentations dealt with key issues such as evaluation of the use of new technologies, the need to impregnate the decisions related to adoption and innovation with the concepts of value and sustainability, and the implication of knowledge networks in the need to strengthen their influence upon the creation of a “culture of innovation” among health professionals. But above all, emphasis was placed on the latent innovation potential of hospitals, and the fact that these, being the large companies that they are, should seriously consider that much of their future sustainability may depend on proper management of their ability to generate innovation, which is not only the generation of ideas but also their transformation into products or processes that create value and economic returns.

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¹ See [Appendix A](#).

PALABRAS CLAVE

Innovación;
Transferencia
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Emprendeduría;
Nuevas tecnologías;
Compra pública
innovadora

Innovación y transferencia tecnológica en ciencias de la salud: Una visión transversal

Resumen Este artículo se basa en la reflexión estratégica y el debate que tuvieron lugar en las primeras jornadas de innovación y transferencia tecnológica en ciencias de la salud, organizadas por REGIC-ENS-FENIN-SEMICYUC y que se celebraron en el Instituto de Salud Carlos III en Madrid, el 7 de mayo de 2013, con el objetivo de impulsar la transferencia de la innovación tecnológica en medicina y asistencia sanitaria, más allá del programa europeo «Horizonte 2020». Las ponencias trataron de temas clave como la evaluación de la utilización de las nuevas tecnologías, la necesidad de impregnar las decisiones relacionadas con la adopción y desarrollo de innovaciones de los conceptos de valor y sostenibilidad y de la implicación de las redes de conocimiento en la necesidad de intensificar su influencia en la creación de una «cultura de la innovación» entre los profesionales de la sanidad. Pero, sobre todo, se insistió en la capacidad de innovación latente en los hospitales y en que estos, como grandes empresas que son, deben plantearse seriamente que buena parte de su sostenibilidad futura puede depender de la buena gestión de su capacidad de generar innovación, lo cual no es únicamente generar ideas, sino llegar a transformarlas en procesos o productos que generen valor y retorno económico.

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Introduction

For over a decade, the issue of innovation has been present on practically all the agendas of business development, including the healthcare sector. There have been many initiatives to support the development of innovations in Spain, beginning with the financial aids that are now increasingly scarce because of the difficult economic situation.

However, without forgetting the necessary financial flow, the strategic reflection and discussion session that took place on occasion of the first conference on innovation and technology transfer in the health sciences organized by the REGIC-ENS-FENIN-SEMICYUC and held in Madrid (Spain) at the Instituto de Salud Carlos III on 7 May 2013 fundamentally addressed other factors crucial for success of the culture of innovation in the hospital setting.

Hospitals comprise a range of situations, experiences, knowledge and wisdom, and are a source of wealth in the form of both tangible and intangible returns ranging from health outcomes to professional satisfaction and growth, and benefits for the industry and economy of the reference geographical context. However, the hospital setting lacks a driving element that is necessary in order to allow the mechanisms for the generation of innovation to function, making it self-sustaining and promoting development of the hospital itself.

The hospital as a company

Hospitals cover key social and economic needs by preserving and restoring the health of the population, though they are also companies that generate products and services, with benefits for society. In Spain there are some 760 hospitals with over half a million fixed employees that generate a business volume of over 44,000 million euros.¹ Hospitals generate unique, specialized and diverse services and products, ranging from the care of patients and their environment to the application and development of highly complex

technologies, the training of professionals, and research and development (R&D) initiatives in collaboration with public or private universities or institutes, and private companies. All these and also many more services are what conform the products portfolio of the “hospital-company”.

The hospital industry comprises many professionals and technologies, and each of these in turn is enormously diverse. In effect, however the hospital employees cover a broad range of professional profiles with highly diverse qualifications, all of which are essential for proper functioning of the hospital (physicians, nurses, clinical assistants, scientists, psychologists, dieticians, software engineers, etc.). The relevant technologies are no less diverse and range from disinfection to the application of complex experimental techniques, kitchen services, transport, patient care, communication and attention, pharmacy management, purchases, and the financing of technological resources. All these areas of activity have their function and impact upon the generation of services, and condition the quality of the outcomes obtained.

In addition to this extraordinary complexity as a company, mention must be made of the legal nature and economic and organizational dependency of the hospital upon structures at a higher (and often territorial) level that determine policies and legislative frameworks that can either limit or promote hospital initiatives. In addition, the healthcare sector is subject to many and complex local and international regulations that must be known and applied, as well as to ambiguous circumstances that can generate uncertainty when it comes to supporting initiatives that are not supported by clear legal specifications.

Technological innovation and evaluation

Technological innovation is defined as innovation resulting from the application of scientific and technological knowledge to the solution of problems that arise in different production sectors and which results in changes in the

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