

TEFARCO Innova, the Regional Centre for Innovation in health products.

Contribution to promote creativity and the launch of new projects

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The Regional Center for Innovation of Health Products is an initiative of the Italian Interuniversity Consortium of Innovative Pharmaceutical Technologies, "TEFARCO Innova". Responding to the 2004 call of the Region Emilia-Romagna program for innovative technologies (PRIITT), TEFARCO, together with three regional Universities (Parma, Ferrara, Modena-Reggio Emilia), obtained a grant for creating the Center for Innovation in Health Products.

The intellectual and technical resources provided by the research groups of the Consortium focus on products of high technology in the *pharmaceutical*, *cosmetic* and *food* fields i.e., preparations having high innovative content and added value. "Health products" is a broad definition since it includes drugs, medicines, cosmetics, nutrients and also machineries for manufacturing these products. TEFARCO performed two years of activity promoting, communicating, producing and transferring the innovation in the health product field from Universities to companies, with special target on SME. The core business was to provide research and innovation of health products for the regional companies, working as technology transfer office for the research products collected from the all national partner Universities. The Center intended to develop the scientific potentialities of the academic partners by a unitary action of transfer of their products toward the industries. The scientific and cultural competencies of the Universities were used for innovation for companies. Complementary objective was also to educate the companies to innovation by means of different instruments such as courses, consulting, stages or simply conferences.

The Center represents a new style in the contacts between academy and industry. The regional support allowed the Center to be less stressed by financial problems. The Center is an interface between two entities having certain level of incompatibility. The language of the Center is more sounding for the companies that found in its procedures, contacts and staff availability the typical style of a commercial action. In addition, the Center offers one referent for several potentialities and bounds the claimed snob behavior of academy. Finally, the critical mass of the Consortium makes feasible to face big or complex problems in a highly productive way. The Center is searching for companies willing to innovate and for products of innovations available in the academic laboratories for licensing or development. The mission is to convince the companies to invest in the knowledge economy since the education to innovation and its protection is an investment. It is the scientific knowledge that produces new ideas and innovation. This is not

industrial research but research for industrial applications. In analogy, it is not applied research but the application of research,.

The experience collected during two years of activity introduced new modalities in the university/industry relationships. Now, TEFARCO is a network center putting together 13 Universities and more than 250 companies, linked to international associations representing opinion leaders in pharmaceutical field. The innovation was the constitution of a group specialized in one sector (pharmacy) managing the TT of that sector. This overpassed the usual university style to create critical mass by engaging in TT academic structures different, often conflicting, disciplines. The Consortium was the answer to how to be an operative mass specialized in a field for research results transfer and development.

This successful positioning derived from the work performed through research contracts, round tables with experts, consulting on innovative products, staff insertion in innovative research groups, workshops on base and applied science, conferences organization, post-graduate education support and know-how and patent transfer.

The Center activity was organized in modules, namely:

1. Creation of the data-base of the companies and of the research products.
2. Promoting, diffusing and communicating the scientific information.
3. Research and transfer of innovative results.
4. Continuous education and training.
5. Consulting for development, registration, patent, spin-off.
6. International collaboration and interception of out region.

Today, the center works as TTO of the University of Parma for the activity in the field of health products. The technology transfer activity in pharmacy was sanctioned by an agreement signed by TEFARCO and University. The agreement gives the possibility to the Center to operate in the University structures in exchange for the promotion action on the products of pharmaceutical research produced in the University. In addition, the Center entered in agreement with AIFA for evaluation of registration dossiers. The European Federation of Pharmaceutical Sciences allowed TEFARCO to become corporate member of the association that represents a focal point for the EU decisions in pharmaceutical innovation. A collaborative contract has been signed with the USA association NIPTE (National Institute for Pharmaceutical Technology and Education). Finally, the positioning in the regional network of innovation is solid thanks to the ASTER (Rete Alta Tecnologia Emilia Romagna) collaboration and the recognition of the expert role in Pharmacy field.

The future will be internationalization, more education involvement, stable reference for health authorities and associations and new company promotion and participation.

In conclusion, the novelty of this networking operation resides on the decision to have the technology transfer activity not cumulated in a multidisciplinary office, but shared on thematic offices created through Universities Consortia in order to have the critical mass attractive for industry. Last but not least, thank to this choice, the conflict between Universities was strongly reduced with a benefit for the academia image: