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10 Indian ideas get a $100,000 boost

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Grand Challenges Canada yesterday, announced the 102 bold global health ideas that have won the $100,000 grant prize. Apart form the 43 ideas that were from Canada, 59 were from low and middle income countries from Africa, Asia , Latin America and the Middle East.

If their ideas prove effective, the innovators will be eligible for an additional Grand Challenges Canada scale-up funding of up to $1 million.The fact that a majority of the ideas, originating from India revolve around the country's major healthcare concerns, diseases such as diabetes and tuberculosis is indeed very apt.

Three of the ideas are centered about the diagnosis of tuberculosis.Niraj Sanghai from Sinhagad Technical Education Society won the grant for the optimization and validation of a point-of-care diagnostic test for tuberculosis, while Devang Patel from Ahmedabad based GIOSTAR Research's idea to develop a novel single assay that can diagnose active, latent and drug-resistant tuberculosis made the cut for the peer reviewed judging process.

Ruchika Raghuvanshi, Vikrant Education Socity is the Principal Investigator on the project for the development of ta immunodiagnostic assay for lipid antigen detection of pulmonary and extra pulmonary tuberculosis that also won a grant. In a telephonic conversation with BioSpectrum she said, "The diagnostic test that we have developed, with my mentor Dr. Bisen, is more accurate than the ones currently in the market, since they involve monoclonal antibodies that are highly specific. We will utilize the grant money to carry out further trials and towards commercialization efforts."

Considering the rapid reach that mobile communications has achieved in recent years, innovators everywhere are creating solutions for tapping into this network for addressing healthcare issues.While DXPhone is a mobile phone platform for glucose monitoring by Sidhant Jena from Janacare Solutions, Vivek Vajaratkar from INFORM is creating a mHealth platform that will improve functional outcomes for children with neuro developmental disabilities with the aid of the network of community health workers in India

Ms.Raghuvanshi added, "The test will be extremely affordable, and made available at Rs.4/sample."

Dr. Peter A. Singer, CEO of Grand Challenges Canada said, "Canada's commitment to bold ideas with big impact is captured in each of these more than 100 peer-reviewed projects. By matching talent with opportunity, Grand Challenges Canada is contributing to saving and improving lives."

Past awardees include Bangalore based Achira Labs, that was given the grant for developing a point of care diagnostic by weaving it into a piece of silk, using the principles of microfluidics and Bigtec Labs for a mini PCR, which was launched recently that can detect infectoius diseases in an affordable and timely manner.

Other innovative ideas include a project, led by Kumari Smita from Battelle Science and Technology India on developing Plant-based high-intensity protein sweeteners as a means to alleviate the growing epidemic of diabetes.

Another important health intervention for highly prevalent condition of anaemia is ToucHb, developed by a group of IIT graduates with medical professionals. ToucHb is a hand held device for that provides a needle free screening mechanism for anaemia in remote areas.

An important innovation in the field of vaccines is a battery operated thermo-electric container, NanoCool by project lead, Pushpagiri Vijayaraghavan from Sathguru Management Consultants, that can address the serious problem of wastage of vaccines due to lack of efficient cold storage facilities. Lastly, Sanjoe Jose from Emprenure Labs won the grant M-Ultra, a low-cost ultrasound scan system that can act as a point-of-care diagnostic tool aiding early diagnosis