

The ‘Australia Model’: how industry and government collaboration is showing us how MedTech can lead the way to a world class advanced manufacturing capability

Ian Burgess BEc, MBA, CEO

Medical Technology Association of Australia, Level 12, 54 Miller Street, North Sydney, NSW 2060, Australia. Email: IBurgess@mtaa.org.au

When the first Australian case of COVID-19 was diagnosed on 25 January 2020, it set in motion a course of events that would ultimately lead to an extraordinary collaboration between government and the medical technology industry as our healthcare institutions set about preparing for a potential avalanche of COVID-19 cases.

Under the leadership of the Medical Technology Association of Australia, a framework and working group structure was developed for a partnership between the Commonwealth Health and Industry departments and the medical technology industry to ensure the supply of critically important medical equipment. Under this structure sits four key workstreams: ventilators, personal protective equipment, testing kits and other intensive care unit (ICU) equipment.

The medical technology industry successfully secured this essential medical equipment through the global supply chain and ramped up Australian manufacturing.

A study published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* in March 2020 found that, in a maximal surge scenario, the number of invasive ventilators available in Australia’s ICUs would fall significantly short of the numbers required.¹ This need led to an intensive effort to produce a large number of ventilators in a short period of time.

In what is being compared to a wartime effort, a consortium of companies has been brought together in an unprecedented collaboration involving government, clinicians and manufacturers, many of whom would ordinarily be competitors.

Bringing together a diverse range of locally produced components and expertise, from printed circuit board assemblies produced by a family-owned business in Western Sydney, to Melbourne-based Australian precision engineering capabilities, to home grown advanced machine tool production, 2000

invasive ventilators will be made available for the Australian stockpile by the end of July 2020.

This represents a significant change in our domestic manufacturing capacity and demonstrates an untapped potential to grow Australia’s advanced manufacturing capabilities, a potential we may never have realised without the unprecedented threat of a global pandemic.

Whilst we must remain vigilant, as of May 2020, it appears that the worst-case scenario is unlikely to eventuate. However, in what has come to be known as ‘the Australia Model’ there are many lessons to be learned. The Australian industry collaboration strategy is increasingly being recognised as one of the best responses globally, with the effort starting to be replicated around the world as the global leadership of multinational firms begin to acknowledge what has been achieved through their Australian operations.

With Australian MedTech leading the way, our world class advanced manufacturing capabilities can become an integral link in the global supply chain as we look towards economic recovery in a post-COVID world.

Competing interests

Ian Burgess is the CEO of the Medical Technology Association of Australia and a Non Executive Director of the Asia Pacific Medical Technology Association.

Reference

- 1 Litton E, Bucci T, Chavan S, Ho YY, Holley A, Howard G, Huckson S, Kwong P, Millar J, Nguyen N, Secombe P, Ziegenfuss M, Pilcher D. Surge capacity of intensive care units in case of acute increase in demand caused by COVID-19 in Australia. *Med J Aust* 2020. doi:10.5694/mja2.50596