

THE HINDU BusinessLine

Bangalore entrepreneur bags Rolex award with device to detect hearing problems in infants

Neeti Kailas to market the apparatus, now in prototype phase, in 2017

VIDYA RAM

London, June 24

Neeti Kailas, a Bangalore-based entrepreneur who runs a project to increase the screening of new-born babies for hearing problems, has been awarded the Rolex Award for Enterprise with four others. They were selected from a global pool of over 1,800.

Kailas, a National Institute of Design alumna, runs the Sohun Innovation Lab in Bangalore with her husband Nitin Sisodia, an engineer. The couple is set to continue clinical trials of a device they have developed to measure the auditory brainstem response of new-borns.

The device is currently at the prototype phase, and they plan to start marketing

it in 2017. They expect to price it at around a fifth of the rate for devices already on the market.

User-friendly

The device is portable, battery-operated and non-invasive — all factors Kailas hopes will increase awareness of the need for an auditory test, as well as access to it.

She is hopeful these features will see it used even in areas with limited health-care resources and skilled health-care workers. The device also has an inbuilt algorithm to filter out ambient noise to ensure it is effective even in noisy places.

Kailas points out that even today there is little focus on hearing problems, which affect four-six of every 1,000

births in India.

“We need to get the message out there that if we can provide timely treatment, your child can learn to speak and lead a normal life,” she said in London, where the awards were announced.

The project has received support from the Department of Biotechnology, the All India Institute for Medical Sciences, as well as the Centre for Innovation in Global Health in the US, and Canada’s Grand Challenge.

Kailas hopes the device will be used in around 2 per cent of births in its first year of use, and rolled out widely thereafter, beyond large tertiary hospitals.

Adoption challenge

Expansion will be one of the project’s challenges given that over 50 per cent of births in India take place outside hospitals or other healthcare

institutions. But Kailas hopes to build a network of paediatricians, healthcare workers and maternity homes. Even entrepreneurs who rent out the device will increase its reach.

The Rolex awards, instituted in 1976, recognise projects in areas ranging from applied technology and the environment to science and health with an award of 50,000 Swiss francs. Among last year’s winners was Sumit Dagar, also from the National Institute of Design, who developed a Braille smart-phone.

Diebedo Francis Kere, one of five jurors for the awards, said Kailas’ project had appealed on an emotional and practical level, not least for its ability to be used in other resource-stretched healthcare systems.

“The screening system she is developing will have an impact across the world.”

itage
3, MD

com
l far

Rail-
pass-
y re-
the
they
ited

pay
pas-

that
ares
class
m.
ways
inre-
into

inst
Sub
Sub
lon
ger