

# Capitalising on research-industry partnerships to advance injury prevention

When Super Bowl XLIX became the most watched programme in American history on Sunday, 1 February 2015, over 110 million people also viewed a commercial from Nationwide Insurance for their website and app, 'Make Safe Happen'. Nationwide Insurance partnered with the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital and Safe Kids Worldwide to develop the tips and tools for caregivers for the 'Make Safe Happen' website and app.<sup>1</sup> With preventable injuries being the leading cause of death in children, Nationwide Insurance aired the commercial and sought to start a conversation and build awareness around child safety and wellbeing.<sup>2</sup> The content of the Nationwide Insurance commercial and messaging to the public on the topic of childhood injury prevention was edgy, thought-provoking, controversial and even disturbing to some.

Outside the discussion about the commercial's content or messaging, the 'Make Safe Happen' app and website brought to the forefront an important issue in injury research, namely that of academic/research and industry partnerships working together to reduce injuries. The partnership helped develop a tool that provides information on childhood injury, with guidance to parents and caregivers for promoting safety associated with multiple types of injury across age groups and contexts. Although the academic/research partners were not necessarily involved in the development of the commercial, the private company's strengths in financial equity and ability to reach the public produced an evocative ad that went viral and evoked much discussion.

Even though there are a number of successful research and industry partnerships that do exist in injury prevention and control, further opportunities could serve to promote injury science. Federal research funding is difficult to obtain by investigators at all stages, with National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding percentiles in the single digits and the CDC's extramural programme restrained by budget cuts. Hence, other mechanisms to conduct rigorous injury science that produces better health outcomes must be explored. Examples of effective partnerships for research translated to practice do exist in the injury field and can help inspire others. For example, the National Science Foundation supports Industry/University Cooperative Research Centers with 59 active centres across the country.<sup>3</sup> Insurance companies have partnered with academic researchers in motor vehicle safety, and motor vehicle manufacturers were some of the initial funders for centres that networked to become the Crash Injury Research and Engineering Network.<sup>4</sup> The National Football League (NFL) has become a major sponsor of research on concussion in collaboration with other private companies such as General Electric, as well as through a collaborative partnership, including the NIH, the NFL and the Foundation for the NIH.<sup>5</sup>

Given that translating research to the commercial market for its intended public use<sup>6</sup> is imperative for accomplishing injury prevention and control, employing the model of research-industry partnership at the inception of the research endeavour can help achieve an expedited approach to reaching this goal. The CDC and the NIH promote Small Business Innovation Research grants. The NIH also offers Small Business Technology Transfer grants. Both support US-based small businesses to engage in research and development that has a strong potential for commercialisation. These

mechanisms place emphasis on the role of developing and advancing small businesses, but these models can be beneficial to our research field, where some scientists have been able to capitalise on such opportunities. The role of technology transfer at universities also promotes commercialisation of research, and accelerates the process of getting products from the research into the hands of the public for consumption. Relationships between researchers and private companies are not without challenges, which may include maintaining independence in the research or perceived conflicts of interest. Even the perception of lack of independence can cast a shadow over research studies funded by private companies and make them less acceptable to other scientists.

As research collaborations with private companies move an injury science agenda forward, we must also keep in mind the evaluation of the products that are developed. The science does not end with commercialisation, and it is critical to continue to evaluate what is consumed by the public, regardless of its funding. For example, the Nationwide Insurance commercial created an opportunity to understand the potential impact of the campaign on the families that visited the website or downloaded the app. We have come to understand that any effective public education programme, whether on injuries, smoking or prescription drug use, must be rigorously researched, clearly focused and well implemented over a considerable period of time. Partnerships between academic/research and industry have the potential to help make needed advances in prevention efforts across multiple types of intentional and unintentional injury, helping ensure that gains made will avoid being as fleeting as the Super Bowl game itself.

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