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Manufacture of surgical instruments receives a facelift

Published : 20 Nov 2014 8:25 am by Jonny Williamson

Technology and Innovation, Reshoring
Pharmaceutical, Plastics

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Image left to right: Helen Pitt, MD (Andel Plastics); Roger Tyler, MD (Blink Medical)

A Birmingham partnership is aiming to innovate the way single use surgical instruments are manufactured and help reshore assembly back to the region.

By teaming up with Andel Plastics, Blink Medical has produced a mould tool that will allow a device used in eye surgery to be made out of plastic instead of the more traditional stainless steel.

The company says its 'double ended marker' is "lighter, safer, and more cost effective to manufacture", benefits Blink predicts could lead to considerable savings for not only the NHS, but health organisations across Europe, the US and, potentially, the Far East.

With backing from the Manufacturing Advisory Service (MAS), the new partnership will see production of the instrument moving from China to Birmingham, creating three immediate jobs in the process.

It also strengthens the relationship between Blink and Andel, with the latter recently investing nearly £70,000 in a new clean room to assemble specialist instrument packs for the medical sector.

Blink Medical's managing director, Roger Tyler commented: "We are continually looking at ways where we can bring innovation to the marketplace and recognised at an early stage that there was potential to consider plastic as a material instead of the traditional reliance on metal.

"This isn't something we could do on our own and needed to seek the expertise of a plastic injection moulder, which is where Andel came into the equation."

Tyler continued: "Tapping into MAS support to help with prototyping and development, we were able to successfully come up with a RP plastic surgical instrument that was more functional and cost effective to produce than its metal counterpart."

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The first orders have just started to arrive and Tyler expects to achieve sales approaching £100,000 during the next twelve months, with an expectation that figure will increase considerably over the coming years.

One of the UK's leading specialists in injection moulding, the Tyseley-based Andel Plastics currently employs 20 people and looks set to reach a turnover of £1.4m in 2014,

Having already made inroads into the medical sector, its managing director, Helen Pitt was delighted to be given the opportunity to work with Blink Medical on the new device and in undertaking specialist assembly of its procedure packs.

"This is the breakthrough we'd been looking for in this sector and has given us the platform to invest £70,000 into a dedicated clean room facility that has six stations and enough capacity to meet future volume increases.

"We've already taken on two manufacturing experts in this area and expect a further couple of appointments as and when production starts to gather pace," Pitt enthused.

She added: "We've had a lot of support from MAS in reviewing our processes and supporting us on accessing funding that helped with prototyping costs...probably speeding up the project by about three months.

"The fact our advisor was also working with Blink Medical was a major factor as he understood the strengths of each business and what the marketplace expected."

Working in partnership with UKTI, the Manufacturing Advisory Service is delivering ReshoreUK, a specialist initiative designed to support SME manufacturers to build capacity and capabilities to take advantage of production returning to the UK.

Martin McKeever, MAS advisor, concluded: "A lot of companies – both large and small – are looking to bring back production they had sent overseas and it's our role to help firms validate their decisions then support them to make it happen."

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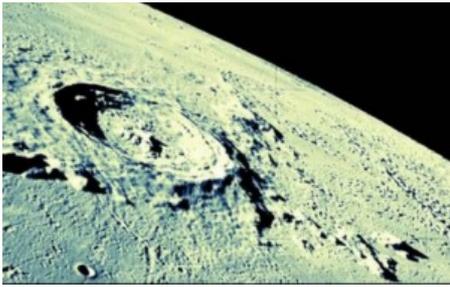
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