

SUCCESS STORY

Healing Hands

How One Jordanian Doctor Became an Inventor



When he became one of the first Jordanians to register a patent in the country's new, globally linked registration system, Dr. Saif Al Riyalat was trying to solve a problem. Like the thorough physician that he is, he was looking for a more effective way to treat one of his patients.

As it happened, that patient was his brother. "At home, my younger brother suffers from eczema, a condition that dries the skin and causes the person to scratch uncontrollably," explains Al Riyalat. "At night, the scratching can cause severe discomfort, but the best 'solution' we could find was to tie the patient's hands—something that's both impractical and ineffective."

So Al Riyalat and his team at the University of Jordan Medical School set out to find their own treatment. The problem? How to keep a patient's skin moisturized throughout the night to reduce the need for scratching—and, with it, painful bleeding and scabs. The solution? A specially designed glove that secretes lotion during the night, allowing the patient to moisturize the skin, unconsciously, while sleeping.

It seemed like such a practical idea that Al Riyalat and his team wanted to know whether it had been patented already. They found no evidence of a similar product anywhere, including in China, where hundreds of thousands of patents have been registered. That, in turn, gave the team an idea: Why not patent the new glove as a Jordanian product?

Within a month, Al Riyalat had a prototype and began researching ways to secure rights to the idea. "We discovered it wasn't too difficult," he recalls. "There are many manuals that assist in how to go about writing a patent. But then, we read about Jordan acceding into the PCT treaty."

"PCT" stands for the Patent Cooperation Treaty, an international mechanism for ensuring that what gets invented in one country enjoys intellectual property, or IP, protection in all other PCT member states. In 2017, around the time Al Riyalat started looking for ways to register the eczema glove, Jordan became the PCT's 152nd member.

"[The Ministry of Industry] talk to you about all the steps, from writing the patent design, to filing it, to the steps you have to take after registering. They are very cooperative—so much so that if you need a follow up on your patent at home or elsewhere, they will come to you."

What that meant was that Jordanian inventors no longer had to travel to neighboring countries to register their innovations. It was a key milestone of the country's Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Supply, which worked with experts from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and its Jordan Competitiveness Program to accede to the treaty. The move was part of the kingdom's larger economic development goal of generating more homegrown IP and, with it, investment.

Al Riyalat explains: "Usually, patent registration protects your patent only in your country, but the PCT protects your patent in countries around the world. Without the PCT, I would have to be present in the countries I want to protect the patent in, or hire a lawyer at least—and be burdened financially...."

Instead, as a Jordanian inventor, Al Riyalat received a 90 percent discount on registration fees. He praised the Ministry's online registration system, which includes an "e-PCT" portal through which inventors can submit their patent applications electronically. It took him less than an hour to complete the process, and the payment was processed online.

Once the application went through, Al Riyalat was contacted by the Ministry's Intellectual Property Protection Department, or IPPD, the unit charged with overseeing implementation of the PCT. That, too, was a seamless, pleasant experience, according to the doctor.

"They talk to you about all the steps, from writing the patent design, to filing it, to the steps you have to take after registering. They are very cooperative—so much so that if you need a follow up on your patent at home or elsewhere, they will come to you."

As for the eczema glove, the team hopes to complete the product in the next few months. For now, testing has become a family affair. "My brother has become an expert in the field of gloves," jokes Al Riyalat. "He tells me which ones are better. The research and development department is my brother honestly."

With some of the highest college graduation rates in the region—especially among women—Jordan has no shortage of talent and of innovative ideas to match. With an eye to unlocking that talent, the USAID Jordan Competitiveness Program continues to work with the Ministry to raise awareness about PCT registration and its benefits, especially among young inventors.