From Resilience *to* Revolution

"The biggest gaps are often not in knowledge, but in access and application."

In an exclusive conversation with Corporate World, Dr. Pooja Sidharth Rao shares her powerful journey of grit, purpose, and how she is redefining reproductive medicine learning in India with a bold, impact-driven approach.

In today's fast-evolving healthcare landscape, the intersection of learning, technology, and real-world impact is being reimagined—and women leaders are at the forefront of this shift. Among them, Dr. Pooja Sidharth Rao, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Medline Academics, stands out for her bold vision and purpose led approach. From overcoming a life-defining medical challenge at a young age to building India's first eLearning platform in reproductive medicine, her journey is both inspiring and deeply grounded in impact.

Blending corporate experience, entrepreneurial grit, and close clinical collaboration with Dr. Kamini Rao Hospitals, Dr. Rao is driving a more accessible, immersive, and outcome focused model of medical education. In this exclusive conversation, she opens up about resilience, innovation, and building solutions that truly move the needle

1. How would you define your leadership style, especially in a field that blends healthcare, technology, and creativity?

My leadership style has evolved over time, but at its core, it remains collaborative, purpose-driven, and adaptive. Working in a space that brings together healthcare, technology, and creativity, I believe it is essential to stay open to diverse perspectives while keeping the larger goal clearly in focus. In the early stages, I was deeply involved in every aspect of building Medline Academics, driven by a hands-on approach and a strong sense of ownership.

However, as the organization grew, I came to understand that leadership is less about control and more about enabling people, encouraging them to think independently, contribute meaningfully, and take ownership of their roles. Healthcare brings with it a deep sense of responsibility, technology introduces speed and constant evolution, and creativity drives innovation. Balancing all three requires clarity of thought and, more importantly, trust within the team. I also strongly believe in leading with empathy, especially in healthcare, where even the smallest decision can have a lasting impact on people's lives.

"Leadership is not about having all the answers—it's about creating an environment where the right answers can emerge."

2.What core values guide your decisions as a leader at Medline Academics?

Three values have consistently guided my decisions—integrity, innovation, and responsibility. Integrity is non-negotiable, especially in healthcare education. Doctors place their trust in us for their learning, and that responsibility shapes every program we design with a strong focus on ethics and long-term impact. Innovation is equally important. The field is evolving rapidly, and staying relevant requires us to continuously adapt, whether through hybrid learning models, technology integration, or modern teaching approaches. Responsibility is what brings everything together. At Medline Academics, we are not just delivering content, we are shaping professionals who will go on to directly influence patient care. These values are also closely aligned with the larger ecosystem we are part of, including the work at Dr. Kamini Rao Hospitals.

"Values are not what you say, they are what consistently guide your choices."

"Leadership is not about having all the answers —it's about creating an environment where the right answers can emerge."

3. Medline Academics is described as a "first of its kind" platform - what gap did you see in reproductive health education that others had overlooked?

The gap became quite evident when we started interacting closely with doctors—there was strong theoretical knowledge, but limited access to structured, hands-on clinical training, especially in reproductive medicine. Many doctors aspired to specialize but lacked the right platform to learn directly from experienced mentors or gain real-world exposure, as traditional learning models were often rigid and location-bound. What we identified was not just a gap in education, but a clear gap in application. That is where Medline Academics stepped in, introducing a hybrid model that seamlessly combined digital learning with clinical experience, making education more accessible while ensuring it remained practical and outcome-driven. Our close association with experts like Dr. Kamini Rao further strengthened this approach by bringing real-world insights and hands-on perspectives into the learning journey.

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4."Gamifying classrooms" is still a novel idea in medical education what inspired you to bring this concept into a serious and technical field?

The idea stemmed from a simple observation—learning becomes far more effective when it is engaging. Medical education is often perceived as intensive and serious, which it truly is, but that does not mean it has to feel monotonous. When learners are actively involved, they tend to retain information better and apply it with greater confidence in real-world scenarios. Gamification, in our context, is not about simplifying the subject, it is about elevating the overall learning experience. It drives participation, sharpens critical thinking, and enables real time problem-solving in a more immersive way. Our intent was to create an

environment where doctors are not just passive listeners, but active participants who are fully engaged in the learning journey. By integrating interactive elements, case-based discussions, and simulation style learning, we have been able to make education more dynamic, impactful, and outcome focused without compromising on its depth or rigor.

"Engagement doesn't dilute seriousness, it strengthens understanding."

5.What does success look like for you -not just as a founder, but as a changemaker in healthcare education?

For me, success is not defined by scale alone, it is defined by impact. As a founder, building Medline Academics into a recognized platform matter, but as a changemaker, what truly counts is the difference we create. When I see doctors trained with us go on to establish their own practices, improve patient outcomes, or bring advanced treatments to smaller cities, that is real success. It is the ripple effect that matters, because one well trained doctor can impact hundreds of lives. The work at Dr. Kamini Rao Hospitals further reinforces this every day, showing how closely education and patient care are connected.

"Success is not what you achieve, it's what continues to grow because of what you built."

6. You've led branding initiatives for fertility centres across multiple cities—how do you tailor communication for such sensitive and personal healthcare topics?

Communication in fertility and women's health needs to come from a place of genuine empathy and understanding. It is not just about sharing information; it is about truly connecting with what patients are going through. Most people in this space are navigating uncertainty, emotional stress, and very personal journeys, so the communication has to feel sensitive, clear, and reassuring, offering guidance without adding pressure. We make a conscious effort to simplify complex medical information into language that feels easy and relatable, while still keeping it accurate and trustworthy. At the same time, we ensure the tone always remains warm, respectful, and compassionate. Since every city and audience has its own cultural nuances, staying adaptable becomes essential to make sure the message resonates in the right way.

7. What's next for Medline Academics—are there any new innovations or expansions on the horizon?

Going forward, our focus is on building a more future-ready and scalable learning ecosystem. We are introducing specialized programs, expanding across geographies, and leveraging advanced technologies to create a more personalized and immersive learning experience. Strengthening our hybrid model remains a priority, ensuring digital learning is seamlessly integrated with real clinical exposure. We are also enhancing access through scholarships and mentorship initiatives, supported by the Kamini Kares Foundation, so that quality education is not limited by financial or geographic barriers. At the same time, our strong connection with Dr. Kamini Rao Hospitals will continue to be a key advantage.

"The future of education lies in accessibility, adaptability, and real-world relevance."