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Switzerland-wide platform for cell therapy launched in Bern

Regenerative Medicine is one of the fastest growing sectors in biomedical research – replacing diseased cells, tissues or organs. A national, public-private platform has now been launched in Bern under the name “Translational and Clinical Bio-Manufacturing (TCBM)”. Its goal is to share expertise in the translation of research results into clinical application to promote Regenerative Medicine as well as new cell therapy approaches in Switzerland.

As a Swiss network, the TCBM Platform supports the rapid transfer of research results into clinical applications (translation). Researchers and clinicians from the seven main Swiss universities and university hospitals are working together with industrial partners to promote translation of cellular and cell-related products. Joint workshops and exchange of know-how and resources will simplify and speed up production processes. Last but not least, training courses will support the education of junior researchers.

Further expansion of the Bern medical location

For Christian Leumann, Rector of the University of Bern, the TCBM Platform reflects the University of Bern’s long tradition in medicine and health. “This made us an important location for teaching and research in the area of advanced medicine”, Leumann says. “One of our aims is to fill the gap between fundamental research and clinical application. The TCBM Platform is helping us make this happen”.

Prof. Eliane J. Müller, Head of Molecular Dermatology and Stem Cell Research at the University of Bern and at Bern University Hospital, and Dr. Steffen M. Zeisberger, Director of Quality Assurance and Cell and Tissue Biobanking at Wyss Zurich, are co-leaders of the platform. “This first shared Swiss platform for translational and medical production of biological components is an important step towards future-oriented research for regenerative therapies”, Uwe E. Jocham, President of the Board of Directors of Insel Gruppe AG, says. “The fact that we, as the Bern site of research, are playing a key role with the co-management fills us with pride. Because, with the Bern University Hospital, we want to be at the forefront of stem cell research and translation.”

Exploiting synergies

The national TCBM Platform promotes synergies in translational and clinical production of biological components on three levels: Firstly, research groups using and operating clean rooms cooperate closely in the bio-manufacturing process. Secondly, they share their expertise in good manufacturing practice, and cooperatively negotiate with Swiss regulatory authorities. Thirdly, the platform promotes collaborations of research groups with the private sector or industry to facilitate joint applications at Innosuisse, the Swiss agency for innovation promotion, or the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).

Increasing visibility for industry and Innosuisse

The TCBM Platform is affiliated with the national organisation “biotechnet Switzerland”, which in turn is part of the National Thematic Network (NTN) “Swiss Biotech”. NTN represents the interests of the Swiss Biotechnological industry, while biotechnet Switzerland supports biotechnological research groups in academia and conveys their expertise to industrial partners. Through affiliation with biotechnet Switzerland, the TCBM Platform becomes visible for industry and Innosuisse. The TCBM Platform is financed, among others, by membership fees of public and private partners. Its administration is supported by the University of Bern’s Faculty of Medicine. “We value this initiative across Switzerland, which seamlessly incorporates into the translational efforts of the University of Bern. We are therefore committed to ensuring its success”, Hans-Uwe Simon, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, reiterates.

National and international vision

After the successful launch of the TCBM Platform, new members will now be recruited from the public and private sector and the Advisory Board constituted by personalities from science, industry and regulatory authorities. In cooperation with sitem-insel AG, the Swiss Institute for Translational and Entrepreneurial Medicine, and the emerging Center for Precision Medicine, first workshops and joint activities in the area of cellular therapies are planned for 2019. Mark Rubin, Director of the Department for BioMedical Research (DBMR) at the University of Bern, is looking forward to the cooperation: “The TCBM-Platform will significantly enhance the development of our Center for Precision Medicine in Bern. Observations made from patients can be translated to model systems for study and the development of new therapies. I am most excited to welcome the TCBM.”

One of the visions of the TCBM Platform is to start its own National Thematic Network (NTN) in Regenerative Medicine and Cell Therapy with partners of biotechnet Switzerland. Furthermore, the group envisages to apply for a NCCR (National Centres of Competence in Research) at the SNSF, and extend its activities to the EU and other international partners.

Prof. Eliane J. Müller, Co-Leader of the TCBM Platform: “During the launch ceremony of sitem-insel AG in Bern, Federal Councillor Schneider-Ammann praised Bern for switching from user to

provider in the area of translational medicine in Switzerland. I think the industry should take heed of this upward trend.”

TCBM - Swiss Network for Regenerative Medicine and Cell Therapy

Five academic groups of seven universities, university hospitals and the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich contributed to its foundation: Stem cell researchers in Regenerative Medicine of the SCRM (Stem Cell Research and Regenerative Medicine) Platform Bern (University of Bern, Bern University Hospital) in cooperation with sitem-insel AG, Wyss Zurich (University of Zurich and ETH Zurich), the Basel GMP Network (University and University Hospital of Basel and ETH Zurich, Basel), the Swiss Institute for Cell Therapies SICT (University Clinics of Lausanne, Geneva, Bern and Cardiocentro Ticino) and the University of Fribourg.

Involved in the foundation were:

- SCRM Platform Bern: Prof Eliane J. Müller; Prof Gabriela M. Baerlocher, Prof. Daniel Surbek, Prof. Benjamin Gantenbein, Dr. Claudio Brunold, www.stemcellsbern.ch
- Wyss Zurich: Dr. Steffen M. Zeisberger, Dr. Martin F. Kayser, www.wysszurich.uzh.ch
- Basel GMP Network: PD Dr. Paul Zajac, Dr. Alessia Bottos, Dr. Sylvie Miot, Prof. Kobi Benenson, Anke Wixmerten, www.baselstemcells.ch
- SICT Foundation: MD Dr. Marisa Jaconi, Dr. Jean-Francois Brunet, www.swiss-ict.ch
- University of Fribourg: Dr. Marie-Noelle Giraud, www.unifr.ch/cardiology

The Steering Committee of the TCBM Platform:

- Prof. Eliane J. Müller; DBMR, University of Bern, foundation and management of the SCRM Platform
- Dr. Steffen M. Zeisberger; Wyss Zurich, University of Zurich & ETH Zurich
- Dr Paul Zajac, ETH-UniBasel GMP facility, University of Basel
- Dr. MD Marisa Jaconi; HUG, University of Geneva, SICT Vice-Director
- Dr. Marie-Noelle Giraud; University of Fribourg

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Innosuisse: <https://www.innosuisse.ch/inno/de/home.html>

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