

GETTING TO KNOW...



A highlight of the Annual Meeting is the Lion's Den, where cardiothoracic surgeons get just two-minutes to present their innovative ideas and techniques to the audience and expert panel. The best presentation is awarded the Techno-Award, which was won in 2019 by Max Emmert, from Wyss Zurich at the University of Zurich and the Department of Cardiothoracic Surgery at the German Heart Center Berlin, for the LifeMatrix bioengineering platform...



Q: What is LifeMatrix?

LifeMatrix is a unique and proprietary bioengineering technology platform to grow tissue in the lab. The idea is to develop next-generation implants that can remodel and regenerate with the patient. We have done a lot of research to test a way forward that provides a clinical grade and off-the-shelf biomimetic implant that can be implemented as a product.

What we have now developed is a biomimetic implant, based on an extracellular matrix that is made from human cells and a specific polymer combination. The cells are then removed (decellularized), leaving behind the LifeMatrix. When implanted, it gradually transforms into living tissue. We have validated this technology in GLP translational animal studies in the context of vascular grafts and heart valves. Several other indications are in the pipeline.

Q: Why did you decide it might be a good candidate for the Lion's Den?

I'm a cardiac surgeon and I have been with EACTS since the beginning of my career. I have always been impressed by the association, by the achievements that are made in patient care, in research and in new developments. We felt at that point that we had something pretty much validated that was an interesting thing to share with our colleagues at EACTS and present in the competition.

We were proud to be shortlisted. Then when we won the award, it was a big achievement for us as a team and a great pleasure and honor to get this positive feedback from the potential users of such a technology. All the surgeons in the room were very supportive. After that, we had multiple approaches from other people who wanted to learn more about the technology, and that was a really cool experience.

Q: How did you prepare for the pitch?

I had just two minutes to pitch. I had to bring the principal idea and problem, the way we would approach it and our solution. I had to attract the audience, tell them why I thought it would work and show them some evidence and our next challenges ahead.

This was followed by an in-depth discussion with the panel, who were physicians and people from industry who had experience in bringing products forward. It was a very colorful and diverse discussion with much good advice for our project.

Q: What is your advice for candidates pitching this year?

Be fast to bring your message across, be clear, and have good visuals to support your message. I think it's also about how you present, so that people can really feel that you are behind your idea, that you know what you're talking about, and you are aware of the natural challenges for your concept. Select your words carefully, as you've only got two minutes sharp. You need to be confident to expose yourself to the situation when the entire room is looking at you.

Also try to enjoy it, because it is a great opportunity to present yourself and to validate your work, and whether people vote for you or not, it is a way to get them interested. To the young surgeons who have great ideas I would say just walk up there and give your best.