

Open Medical Technologies for Space Exploration and Sustainable Human Development

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SUMMARY

The primary aim of this COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) Action is to establish an international network focused on the development of open, not-for-profit medical technologies. This network seeks to ensure the safety and health of individuals residing in temporary or permanent settlements beyond Earth, as well as those in other challenging environments. Additionally, it aims to provide comprehensive healthcare for people who are dependent or at risk due to factors such as ageing, illness, socioeconomic and political conditions, or remote and isolated locations. The overarching goal is to support sustainable human development.

Global Health and Healthcare Access

With global health and the universalisation of healthcare access as central priorities, this network will work to strengthen connections among students, researchers, practitioners, and stakeholders. By fostering collaboration, it will also drive the development and availability of innovative medical technologies designed to preserve and enhance human health. This initiative will contribute to a sustainable future for humanity by addressing a range of critical areas:

1. **Satellite Systems for Epidemic Management:** leveraging satellite technology for the study, forecasting, and prevention of epidemics. Satellites can provide crucial data for monitoring disease outbreaks, enabling timely and informed responses.
2. **Autonomous Habitable Structures:** developing autonomous, self-sufficient, and sustainable living environments equipped with independent health systems. These structures are essential for long-duration space missions and for providing healthcare in remote or underserved regions on Earth.
3. **Advancement of Telemedicine and e-Health:** enhancing telemedicine, e-Health, and medical tele-education to improve access to healthcare and medical knowledge. These technologies are vital for remote or isolated populations, ensuring they receive timely and effective medical care.

Why This Initiative Matters

This initiative is poised to advance our understanding and drive innovation in several key ways:

- **Innovative Solutions:** by creating a collaborative network, the initiative will spur the development of cutting-edge medical technologies that address both space-specific and terrestrial healthcare challenges.
- **Enhanced Research:** strengthening links between diverse experts will facilitate knowledge exchange and accelerate research, leading to breakthroughs in health science and technology.
- **Improved Health Outcomes:** insights gained from space medicine research can translate into significant benefits for Earth-based healthcare. For example, studies on muscle and bone density loss in space can inform new treatments for osteoporosis and other conditions on Earth.
- **Sustainable Development:** the focus on creating autonomous and sustainable systems aligns with global sustainability goals. These advancements will have far-reaching applications, contributing to the development of resilient, self-sufficient healthcare systems both in space and on Earth.

Advancing Space Medicine and Earth-Based Healthcare through International Collaboration

As humanity extends its reach beyond Earth, the field of space medicine emerges as a crucial area of research and development. The objective of this COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) Action is to establish an international network dedicated to the creation of open, not-for-profit medical technologies. These technologies aim to safeguard the health of individuals residing in both extraterrestrial environments and isolated areas on Earth. This white paper outlines the rationale behind this initiative, reviews the state-of-the-art in space medicine, and discusses how this collaborative effort will drive innovation and enhance global healthcare.

Space Exploration and Medical Challenges

Space exploration presents unique medical challenges that are not encountered on Earth. The microgravity environment of space affects the human body in various ways, including muscle atrophy, bone density loss, fluid shift, and altered cardiovascular function. Additionally, the increased exposure to cosmic radiation poses long-term health risks. As we prepare for extended missions to the Moon, Mars, and beyond, addressing these challenges is imperative to ensure astronaut health and mission success.

Earth-Based Healthcare

On Earth, healthcare faces its own set of challenges, particularly for individuals who are dependent or at risk due to factors such as ageing, chronic illness, socioeconomic conditions, and geographical isolation. Access to comprehensive healthcare in remote and underserved regions remains a significant issue. By leveraging advancements in space medicine and technology, solutions can be adapted to improve healthcare delivery in these areas.

State-of-the-Art in Space Medicine: Current Advances

Microgravity Research: Research in microgravity has provided valuable insights into human physiology and pathology. Studies have led to advancements in understanding muscle and bone health, cardiovascular dynamics, and fluid regulation. This research is crucial for developing countermeasures to mitigate the adverse effects of space travel on astronauts.

Radiation Protection: Space agencies are developing advanced shielding technologies and medical countermeasures to protect astronauts from cosmic radiation. This includes pharmaceuticals that might reduce radiation-induced damage and advanced materials for spacecraft shielding.

Autonomous Health Systems: Innovations in autonomous health systems are crucial for long-duration missions where immediate medical intervention is not always possible. These systems include diagnostic tools, telemedicine capabilities, and automated treatment protocols.

Telemedicine and e-Health: Telemedicine and e-Health technologies have seen significant growth, providing remote diagnostic and therapeutic capabilities. These technologies are particularly valuable for remote or isolated populations on Earth and can be adapted for space missions.

Advancing Knowledge

The creation of an international network will foster collaboration across disciplines, leading to the development of innovative medical technologies. These solutions will address both space-specific and Earth-based healthcare challenges. By connecting students, researchers, practitioners, and stakeholders, this network will also enhance the exchange of knowledge and accelerate research in both space medicine and terrestrial healthcare. Advances in space medicine can lead to breakthroughs in understanding human health and disease, benefiting both astronauts and people on Earth. For instance, research on muscle and bone loss in space can inform treatments for osteoporosis on Earth.

Driving Innovation

1. **Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration:** The network will encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration, bringing together experts from various fields to solve complex problems. This approach will drive innovation and lead to the development of novel medical technologies.
2. **Sustainable Development:** The focus on creating autonomous, self-sufficient habitable structures and health systems aligns with the goals of sustainable human development. These technologies will have applications both in space and in remote or underserved regions on Earth.
3. **Global Health Impact:** By prioritising the universalisation of access to healthcare, the network will contribute to global health improvements. Enhanced telemedicine and e-Health solutions will provide better access to medical care and knowledge, especially in remote and isolated areas.

The establishment of an international network dedicated to developing open, not-for-profit medical technologies represents a significant advancement in both space medicine and Earth-based healthcare. By addressing the unique challenges of space exploration and leveraging innovations for terrestrial applications, this initiative will enhance our understanding of human health, drive technological advancements, and promote sustainable development.

COST Association AISBL

Avenue du Boulevard - Bolwerklaan 21, box 2 | 1210 Brussels, Belgium
T +32 (0)2 533 3800 | office@cost.eu | www.cost.eu



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Network of Proposers - Details

Main Proposer's Details

Title:	Mr		
First Name:	Enric	Gender:	M
Last Name:	Torrents	Is Young Researcher and Innovator:	No
Institution:	Universitat Rovira i Virgili	Type of Institution:	COST Full Member
Sub-field of Science of Department:	Other social sciences	Core Area of Expertise:	Other social sciences (Medical anthropology)

Secondary Proposers' Details

Australia

Dr Piers Gooding (University of Melbourne [Melbourne Law School])

Participating as Secondary Proposer
Core Expertise: Law: International law
Gender: U
Is Young Researcher and Innovator: Yes

Canada

Ms Marieke de Korte (University of Toronto [Temerty Faculty of Medicine; Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathobiology])

Participating as Secondary Proposer
Core Expertise: Basic medicine: Innate immunity
Gender: F
Is Young Researcher and Innovator: Yes

Egypt

Dr Ahmed Baraka (Egyptian Space Agency [Space Life Science])

Participating as Secondary Proposer
Core Expertise: Basic medicine: Pharmacology, pharmacogenomics, drug discovery and design, drug therapy
Gender: M
Is Young Researcher and Innovator: Yes

France

Mr Jean-Christophe Combaz (Ubiscope)

Participating as Secondary Proposer
Core Expertise: Computer and Information Sciences: Artificial intelligence, intelligent systems, multi agent systems
Gender: M
Is Young Researcher and Innovator: No

Germany

Mr Celia Tundidor (Technischen Universität München)

Participating as Secondary Proposer
Core Expertise: Other engineering and technologies: Databases, data mining, data curation, computational modelling for other engineering and technologies
Gender: U
Is Young Researcher and Innovator: Yes

Ghana

Mr Alexander Hope Ferdinand Ferguson (Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology)


Participating as Secondary Proposer
Core Expertise: Mechanical engineering: Aerospace engineering
Gender: M
Is Young Researcher and Innovator: Yes

Hungary

Dr Laszlo Bacsardi (Budapest University of Technology and Economics [Department of Networked Systems and Services])

Participating as Secondary Proposer
Core Expertise: Electrical engineering, electronic engineering, Information engineering: Quantum cryptology

Gender: M
Is Young Researcher and Innovator: Yes

 **India**

Dr Ajay Kumar (Institute of Aerospace Medicine Indian Air Force - IAM IAF [Department of Acceleration Physiology and Spatial Orientation])

Participating as Secondary Proposer
Core Expertise: Clinical medicine: Aerospace Medicine
Gender: M
Is Young Researcher and Innovator: No

Ms Ruth Singh (ELUCIDATA [PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT])

Participating as Secondary Proposer
Core Expertise: Biological sciences: Biophysics
Gender: F
Is Young Researcher and Innovator: Yes

 **Indonesia**

Dr Indah Widyahening (Universitas Indonesia - Faculty of Medicine Universitas Indonesia [Community Medicine])

Participating as Secondary Proposer
Core Expertise: Health Sciences: Epidemiology
Gender: F
Is Young Researcher and Innovator: No

Dr Adriana Viola Miranda (Global Health Focus Asia)

Participating as Secondary Proposer
Core Expertise: Health Sciences: Public and environmental health
Gender: F
Is Young Researcher and Innovator: Yes

 **Mexico**

Ms Andrea Cristina Cavero Arrivasplata (Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey - Centro de Biotecnología FEMSA [Biomedical Engineering Laboratory])

Participating as Secondary Proposer
Core Expertise: Medical biotechnology: Gene therapy, stem cell therapy, regenerative medicine for medical biotechnology
Gender: F
Is Young Researcher and Innovator: Yes

 **Peru**

Ms Aurora Britania Diaz Fernandez (Universidad Nacional de San Agustin - Universidad Nacional De San Agustin [Faculty of Medicine])

Participating as Secondary Proposer
Core Expertise: Basic medicine: Neuroanatomy and neurophysiology
Gender: F
Is Young Researcher and Innovator: Yes

 **Spain**

Mr Cayetano Santana Gil (Fundación Canaria ALCASIV [Administration])

Participating as Secondary Proposer
Core Expertise: Economics and business: Human resource management
Gender: M
Is Young Researcher and Innovator: No

Ms Ana Yuan Montes (Universidad de Cantabria - Universidad de Cantabria)

Participating as Secondary Proposer

Core Expertise: Clinical medicine: Health services, health care research

Gender: F

Is Young Researcher and Innovator: Yes

Dr David Marcos (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid - CSEU-LASALLE [Departamento de Fisioterapia y Rehabilitación])

Participating as Secondary Proposer

Core Expertise: Health Sciences: Health services, health care research

Gender: M

Is Young Researcher and Innovator: Yes

 **Sweden**

Ms Jeromine Vacquie (Uppsala University - Institutionen för medicinsk biokemi och mikrobiologi)

Participating as Secondary Proposer

Core Expertise: Health Sciences: Environment and health risks including radiation

Gender: F

Is Young Researcher and Innovator: Yes

 **United Kingdom**

Ms Clara Richard (King's College London)

Participating as Secondary Proposer

Core Expertise: Biological sciences: Apoptosis

Gender: F

Is Young Researcher and Innovator: Yes

Dr Tom Kane (University of Stirling [Stirling Management School])

Participating as Secondary Proposer

Core Expertise: Economics and business: Databases, data mining, data curation, computational modelling

Gender: M

Is Young Researcher and Innovator: No

 **United States**

Mr Sabin Karki (Indiana University School of Medicine)

Participating as Secondary Proposer

Core Expertise: Medical engineering: Medical engineering and technology

Gender: M

Is Young Researcher and Innovator: Yes

Mr Semran Thamer (Dartmouth)

Participating as Secondary Proposer

Core Expertise: Biological sciences: Astrobiology

Gender: M

Is Young Researcher and Innovator: Yes