

Scientific Transfer makes Healthcare Industry fit



Mr. Heinze, would you please give us some examples how the expense factor 'health as a branch of industry' can be made fit.

Prof. Heinze: Let us take, for example, the demographic shift of our society toward more old people. We must consider the fact that in the coming years there will be up to 10,000 new cases of dementia diagnosed annually, while care increasingly becomes the task of the state. This is an extreme burden on the national economy. Moreover, the candle is burning at both ends. Not only are there less and less young people, many of them move away from Saxony-Anhalt. There is an urgent need for action. Consequently, we in Saxony-Anhalt are developing intelligent strategies against dementia while, at the same time, creating jobs for young people via our new care concept. We are taking the entire chain of innovative diagnosis and treatment measures into consideration, including local therapy and private fitness centres.

Fitness clubs against dementia?

Prof. Heinze: Magdeburg is one of the main locations of the 'Deutsches Zentrum für Neurodegenerative Erkrankungen (DZNE)' (German Centre for Neurodegenerative Diseases) involved in researching suitable brain stimulation methods, capable of delaying the course of dementia. This also includes developing suitable physical training measures, so that fitness centres can eventually treat patients on site in accordance with doctor prescribed therapies.

You provided a decisive impetus to the foundation of an interdepartmental Healthcare Industry Task Force (IMAG). How would you judge the results after one year?

Prof. Heinze: We are in the process of developing an exemplary model of dementia treatment for Saxony-Anhalt's healthcare industry. In addition, the members of the IMAG have introduced many good ideas from their different fields of expertise. For example, the subject of dementia also induces the development of telemedical procedures aimed at empowering dementia patients to live autonomously in their own homes as long as possible. At the moment, we at the university clinic are testing the remote neurological monitoring of such patients, employing newly-developed electrode headsets. Such home monitoring would also allow for the more targeted use of limited nursing resources. The headsets developed by Nielsen Company in the USA could be licenced for production here. (Remark for Prof. Heinze: This statement was also given in the press release from 19 November 2012).

The treatment approaches originating from phytotherapy represent a further building block. In Saxony-Anhalt, we also have outstanding expertise in this field. Agents from plant-based extracts, or diets which are fortified with them, can stimulate cerebral activity. As such, we are working on a universally innovative concept for a segment of the healthcare industry.

You spoke of the other side of the 'candle': the lack of young workers. Warnings about the nursing crisis have been sounded everywhere.

Prof. Heinze: This is an issue we have factored in. At the University of Halle you can study nursing science and can graduate with either a bachelor's or master's degree. In our opinion, the academization of the nursing profession makes sense and is becoming increasingly important, so that in future nursing professionals can care for patients with a greater degree of independence and to will be able to make more decisions by themselves. This will also enhance the status of nursing as a career-choice.

A survey by Nord/LB in 2011 included the critique that Saxony-Anhalt's healthcare industry lacks a defined profile. Apparently, the interdepartmental taskforce is engaged in the process of changing this.

Prof. Heinze: The study showed that a unifying goal had been missing until now. In the meantime, we have mapped one out. However, I also want to point out that we have a great deal of creative scientific potential in our state. It must be unified and its outcomes transferred into the economy just as was done with the research campus 'Stimulate', which – in partnership with Siemens – will bring together university-based research, engineering sciences and industrial manufacture in the realm of image-guided minimally invasive medicine. Competing with some 90 other applicants, Magdeburg managed to land one of the eight research campus locations promoted by the Federal Government. That is a clear sign of excellence. The topic of minimally invasive medicine fits this conversation very well, by the way, since many older people are no longer suitable candidates for major surgical procedures.

How will the healthcare industry profit from all these activities?

Prof. Heinze: We can develop pilot projects in Saxony-Anhalt to demonstrate how western societies can deal with the problem of an aging society in a creative and economically reasonable manner. An innovative care concept for patients suffering from dementia would enable us to reach an exclusive position. Then we could provide optimised diagnostic services, based on centralised standards, and suitable therapy possibilities to other states as well. I see the chance for growth there in addition to interesting opportunities for medical technology sector in terms of new equipment development and manufacture.

What timescale are we talking about?

Prof. Heinze: In October we will present our list to the state government and next year we want to apply for EU funding. We will be able to complete the research study on remote neurological monitoring by the end of this year. Translating the project into practice is something we want to start with immediately thereafter.

Thanks for the conversation!

The interview partner, Prof. Dr. Hans-Jochen Heinze, was born in 1953. He is the director of the Clinic for Neurology at Otto von Guericke University of Magdeburg as well as the director of the Department of Behavioural Neurology at the Leibniz Institute for Neurobiology.

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