

Press Release

world expert in neurorehabilitation joins EPFL's Valais Wallis team

EPFL and the Defitech Foundation are committed to putting technology to work for disabled people. At the Clinique Romande de Réadaptation in Sion, EPFL has created a chair for Friedhelm Hummel, a globally renowned expert in post-stroke rehabilitation.

Each year, over 12 million people around the world – including 16,000 people in Switzerland – suffer a stroke. It is the leading cause of disability in adults, as only a quarter of patients experience no after effects. To ensure victims regain as much independence as possible, new techniques have been developed, including non-invasive electrical or magnetic brain stimulation. The pioneer behind this highly promising technique is Friedhelm Hummel, who is joining EPFL thanks to funding from the Defitech Foundation. His chair was inaugurated today at the Clinique Romande de Réadaptation de la Suva (CRR) in a ceremony attended by Esther Waeber-Kalbermatten, President of the Valais Cantonal Government, Marcel Maurer, Mayor of Sion, and Sylviane Borel, Chair of the Defitech Foundation.

Mr. Hummel will divide his time between EPFL's Valais outpost at the CRR and EPFL's Geneva team on Campus Biotech. He will conduct his clinical research in the Valais, focusing primarily on non-invasive magnetic and electrical brain stimulation. Mr. Hummel was previously Vice Director of the Department of Neurology and Head of the Brain Imaging and Neuro-Stimulation (BINS) Laboratory at the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf.

Defitech increases its support for EPFL

Through Mr. Hummel's chair, the Defitech Foundation has strengthened its support for EPFL. The Foundation was created by Sylviane Borel and her husband Daniel Borel, the founder of Logitech, and aims to put technology to work for disabled people.

"In the 15 years that the Foundation has existed, we have covered all aspects of disability," said Daniel and Sylviane Borel. "We started in a specialized center for children, where we set up games and videoconference systems. Then in 2008, we partnered with EPFL and funded José Millan's chair and his incredible brain-machine interfaces. With Friedhelm Hummel, we are getting more directly involved in clinical work, and we're really excited about it."

Making the Valais a global center for disability research

For EPFL's Valais outpost, this appointment is part of EPFL's ongoing efforts to make Sion a center for research in neurorehabilitation. Since 2013, more than 100 patients have been recruited from Valais Hospital and the CRR, where an EPFL team is already working, and ten clinical projects are currently underway there.

In addition to Mr. Hummel, Grégoire Courtine, who is well known for the spectacular results he has achieved in treating spinal cord injuries, is also working at EPFL's Valais site. At the CRR, he will conduct clinical tests on his robot-assisted rehabilitation platform which, coupled with a system for stimulating the spinal cord, is one of the most promising future therapies for spinal cord paralysis.

Furthermore, in order to integrate the latest neuroprosthetic technologies into its treatment program, the HES-SO Valais-Wallis, EPFL, the CRR and Valais Hospital will introduce a ground-breaking training program designed to bring together researchers and therapists and combine technological, methodological, relational and social approaches to treatment. This initiative will make Sion a unique skills center in the area of disability, with everything from fundamental research to concrete clinical applications.

For Esther Waeber-Kalbermatten, President of the Valais Cantonal Government, such developments "offer great promise that those with reduced mobility will gain from rehabilitation, and I hope they will have better chance of leading a normal life".

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Press kit

Documents, photos <http://bit.ly/defitech2016>

About Defitech Foundation

<http://www.defitech.ch/>