

SustainMed – new project aims to make material consumption in hospitals more efficient

## **How can we meet patient needs without amassing waste?**

**(Stuttgart) – BioRegio STERN Management GmbH is a partner in the “SustainMed” project. This initiative aims to develop waste and resource management strategies for medical products and processes in order to minimize the use of disposable materials and optimise recycling rates. Currently, the average hospital in Germany produces around eight metric tons of waste every day, with just under five million metric tons of waste accumulating across Germany each year. That makes hospitals the fifth largest waste producer in Germany. The Ministry of the Environment, Climate Protection and the Energy Sector Baden-Württemberg is providing total funding of approximately 400,000 euros so the four SustainMed partners can create a sustainability tool that will help deliver an all-encompassing ecological transformation in the healthcare sector.**

As things currently stand, material consumption in hospitals is too high, with hygiene very much the top priority and the issue of recycling all too often ignored. That is particularly true when it comes to workflows that generate large volumes of waste such as nappies or diapers, incontinence bed pads and single-use instruments such as scissors. Many doctors, nursing staff and even patients have long since been aware of this issue, and are becoming increasingly critical of the way that medical equipment and materials are simply “thrown away”. However, recycling is a complex task in this type of context. Many medical products comprise a mix of materials, making it virtually impossible to put them into a single material category. Stringent regulatory requirements for disposal and processing operations make it even more difficult to pursue sustainable approaches. There are no established recycling routes for reusable clinical materials in either Germany or Europe as a whole.

This is where SustainMed comes in. This project aims to develop waste and resource management strategies for medical products and processes that will minimize the use

of disposable materials and optimise recycling rates. The partners behind this initiative are BioRegio STERN Management GmbH, Novis GmbH from Tübingen, FREESIXTYFIVE GmbH from Bad Kreuznach and the Department of Traumatology and Reconstructive Surgery at BG Hospital Tübingen (Klinik für Unfall- und Wiederherstellungschirurgie der BG Klinik Tübingen). Launched on 1 February 2024, SustainMed is scheduled to run for 18 months and is being supported with funding from the Ministry of the Environment, Climate Protection and the Energy Sector Baden-Württemberg. The four project partners have a total of around 500,000 euros for the purpose of developing a sustainability programme for the healthcare sector.

The processes and digital tools created during the project are initially being installed as part of a pilot application at BG Hospital Tübingen, which specialises in acute care and rehabilitation for seriously injured patients and patients suffering from work-related conditions. “Numerous surveys have been carried out over recent years to record and quantify the current situation regarding sustainability in the healthcare sector. However, there are still very few solutions designed specifically to improve the situation,” explains Prof. Tina Histing, Medical Director of BG Hospital Tübingen, pointing out that, although there is a desire to make healthcare more sustainable, there is a distinct lack of digital solutions to support suitable processes.

The SustainMed project will therefore start by ascertaining the requirements of stakeholders in the medical technology sector and in hospitals themselves. This work can then be used as a basis for identifying the potential for avoiding and reusing products with the aid of waste analyses, process monitoring, participant surveys and secondary analyses in the hospital. This will lead on to simplified loops designed to reduce material consumption and boost recycling rates. Working with nursing staff, doctors, managers, procurement staff and manufacturers, the project partners are aiming to design and introduce standardised, simple analysis concepts for the development and use of sustainable products. The provision of an online platform should help map the sustainability process across the entire value chain and pull together the various products and services for the different stakeholders. “The development of a sustainability tool rooted in a database will promote the concepts of reducing consumption and recycling materials, simplify processes in the hospital and, of course, ease the workload of nursing staff,” explains Christian Becker, Managing

Director of FREESIXTYFIVE GmbH, which develops industry solutions and online platforms.

Dr. Thomas Helle, CEO of Novis GmbH and an expert on sustainability, recycling and waste management: “The SustainMed project will first and foremost look at ways we can make more intensive use of products by reutilising used goods, either in whole or in part, remanufacturing products, carrying out maintenance, repairs and modernisation, and pursuing cascading.” The project also aims to examine the potential offered by product design, such as using secondary raw materials, substituting problematic materials, developing modular systems and enhancing suitability for repair – naturally all in line with regulatory requirements.

Getting the medical technology sector involved early in the process is a crucial prerequisite for the successful development of such a holistic solution in the healthcare sector. “Medical technology companies and hospitals must talk to each other on a level playing field. This is where BioRegio STERN Management GmbH, with its vast network and experience in establishing sector-specific communication and cooperation can provide the ideal support,” emphasises project manager Anja Reutter. “We are pleased that by participating in this project we can play a part in making resource-friendly materials management part and parcel of day-to-day life in the healthcare sector. We want to answer the question of how to meet patient needs without amassing more waste.”

GEFÖRDERT DURCH



**Baden-Württemberg**

MINISTERIUM FÜR UMWELT, KLIMA UND ENERGIEWIRTSCHAFT

BETREUT VOM



**PTKA**  
**Projektträger Karlsruhe**  
Karlsruher Institut für Technologie

### **About BioRegio STERN Management GmbH:**

BioRegio STERN Management GmbH promotes economic development in the life sciences industry, helping to strengthen the region as a business location by

supporting innovations and start-up companies in the public interest. It is the main point of contact for company founders and entrepreneurs in the Stuttgart and Neckar-Alb regions, including the cities of Tübingen and Reutlingen. The STERN BioRegion is one of the largest and most successful bioregions in Germany. Its unique selling points include a mix of biotech and medtech companies that is outstanding in Germany and regional clusters in the fields of automation technology and mechanical and plant engineering.

**Press contact:**

BioRegio STERN Management GmbH  
Dr. Klaus Eichenberg  
Friedrichstrasse 10  
70174 Stuttgart  
Germany  
+49 711-870354-0  
eichenberg@bioregio-stern.de

<https://www.linkedin.com/>

**Editorial department:**

Zeeb Kommunikation GmbH  
Anja Pätzold  
Alexanderstrasse 81  
70182 Stuttgart  
Germany  
+49 711-6070719  
info@zeeb.info