

Women-up

Development of a solution for the home treatment of urinary incontinence.

COLLABORATIVE R&D PROJECTS



Contact

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Main actors

- CREB UPC – Project coordinator
- Hospital Clínic – Clinical leader
- Mega Electronics Ltd – Medical Technology Company
- Academic Medical Center – Obstetrics/ Gynecology and Clinical Research Unit
- Kuopio University Hospital – Gynecology and Rehabilitation Services
- Babes-Bolyai University – Health Psychology Research
- YouRehab Ltd – Training Software Company
- European Urogynaecological Association (EUGA) – Results dissemination
- UPC Technology Center (CIT UPC) – High-level support in the definition of the concept, approach and consortium for the H2020 proposal

WOMEN-UP is the first European collaborative R&D project in the field of urinary incontinence, a disorder that affects 56 million Europeans, most of whom are women. High performance technology patented by the UPC and Hospital Clínic is being used to carry out pelvic floor rehabilitation at home. During the project, the technology will be improved and tested in three European hospitals, with the collaboration of some of the top European specialists in urinary incontinence, and the support of the European Urogynaecological Association (EUGA). The project has a budget of 3.5 million euros and a duration of 3,5 years.

Project video (recently launched): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PCiH2YKEfuQ>

Process Main Stages

STAGE 1 – LONG-TERM COLLABORATION IN THE FIELD OF PELVIC FLOOR TRAINING

In 2010 CREB UPC and Hospital Clínic initiated a research collaboration in the field of urinary incontinence, which resulted in a prototype of a biofeedback system for the training of pelvic floor. By the end of 2012 they had developed and successfully tested a high-performance device for rehabilitating the pelvic floor at home, which offered advanced features, similar to those used in clinical practice. The solution was protected with a joint patent.

STAGE 2 – IDENTIFYING AND CONTACTING A SUITABLE INDUSTRIAL PARTNER FOR MARKET EXPLOITATION

After that, both partners wanted to transfer these results to the market and started to explore the possibilities of creating a European collaborative project in this field. To do so, the first step was to identify a suitable company to join the consortium and lead the industrial aspects. The company selected was Mega Electronics, a Finnish SME with experience in advanced technology for EMG, ECG and EEG monitoring applications, both in hospital laboratory and field conditions.

STAGE 3 – SETTING UP A EUROPEAN COLLABORATIVE PROJECT PROPOSAL

The creation of a European collaborative project proposal required expanding the core group with the participation of other complementary partners. It was decided that the proposal should involve a multicenter clinical study in 3 EU hospitals, so two additional hospital were invited to the consortium. Additional complementary partners were selected based on their expertise in aspects such as e.g. health psychology or adherence to treatments.

STAGE 4 – APPROVAL AND EXECUTION OF THE WOMEN-UP PROJECT

After submission to the H2020 call, the proposal was approved for funding and WOMEN-UP became the first project of its kind to be financed in Europe. The proposal was evaluated with the highest score in the H2020 Health Call of 2014. The project started in February 2015 and is expected to finish by July 2018.

Touchpoints & Bottlenecks

The description below applies to stages 2-3, when the multilateral collaboration was established and the related technology transfer process consolidated.

TOUCHPOINT 1 – INTRODUCTORY E-MAIL COMMUNICATION

The first communication with the candidate partners was done by e-mail, explaining the background, introducing the opportunity (i.e. the H2020 call) and indicating the possible role of the candidate partner.

TOUCHPOINT 2 – REGULAR FACE-2-FACE COMMUNICATION WITH THE PARTNERS

During the execution phase, face-2-face meetings were held regularly, either bilateral or multilateral (with the participation of the whole consortium).

TOUCHPOINT 3 – VIRTUAL AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

Regular e-mail, phone and skype communication was established between the partners during the preparation of the project proposal. A web repository (dropbox) was also used in order to share relevant documentation.

Success Factors / Barriers

After a joint collaboration in the field of urinary incontinence, CREB UPC and Hospital Clínic decide to jointly apply for a H2020 project, with the support of the UPC Technology Center (CIT UPC). The first step was to find a suitable company interested in taking the product to the market. Several candidates were identified and contacted, resulting in the company Mega Electronics joining the consortium. A key decision factor was the fact that Mega Electronics already had a commercial product for pelvic floor training, which they wanted to improve with the WOMEN-UP project. The fact that the company was also familiar with EU projects contributed to a favorable decision.

Another key success factor for preparing a good proposal was the involvement of highly complementary partners, each of them providing the required expertise for the project (including research, clinical and industrialization capacities).

Finally, the execution of a multicenter clinical study in 3 hospitals (Spain, Finland, and The Netherlands) was also very positively perceived by the evaluators. The fact of involving patients from 3 different countries was important in order to provide a good solution, as urinary incontinence has very different connotations in different countries (e.g. social aspects, preferred treatments, available information, patients' behavior, etc.).

Conclusion

There is a fierce competition in H2020 programme nowadays, meaning that only the best projects are selected for funding. The call topics are increasingly more and more open, giving the applicants the freedom to propose a research of their interest and at the same time fitting with the expected impacts detailed in the respective call topic. For this reason, it is especially important to select the project topic very well. WOMEN-UP focuses on urinary incontinence, a disease that has a tremendous impact (social, quality of life, economic, etc.) for Europe but where no previous collaborative projects were funded at EU level. Carefully building of a consortium where each partner had a very clear and complementary role can also be considered a key success factor.

DO

- Strategically choose the partners to build the consortium based on the expertise they can bring to the project
- When choosing a topic for a H2020 project proposal, choose for original and high impactful topics.
- When addressing a challenge where different aspects (clinical, social, behavioral) aspects may vary significantly between countries, it is very important to involve communities from several complementary regions, so that they are well represented in the definition and delivering of the final solution.

DON'T

- Do not leave Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) discussion for the end; IPR rules should be clear from the project start, especially for those projects where the resulting technology is expected to be commercialized.
- For projects involving clinical studies: do not underestimate the efforts need in order to recruit the patients needed for the clinical trials.

