

LSZ Impact – The Cause of Health: February 03, 2020

Maintaining better health thanks to strong collaborations



Photos: Andi Bucher

The health care system places a greater emphasis on the treatment of diseases than the root causes of our health – this is also down to a lack of data. The Life Science Zurich Business Network brought together representatives from the worlds of science, business and civil society at an international conference in Zurich with the aim of devising new models.

The conference was dedicated to the theme of participation. Around 370 international experts convened under the motto "The Cause of Health" both to discuss presentations on research projects and, more specifically, to forge alliances. This was the overarching aim of the conference organizers, Life Science Zurich (LSZ) Business Network, a non-profit association, Business and economic Development (AWA) of the Canton of Zurich and the Bio-Technopark Schlieren-Zurich the partners Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich (ETH), University of Zurich (UZH), ZHAW School of Life Sciences and Facility Management as well as the City of Zurich, with the University Hospital Zurich and Wyss Zurich as sponsors. The organizing team states: "We brought people together. Apart from spontaneous networking, more than 200 1-to-1 meetings took place, and in the investor track, a total of 13 innovative start-ups presented their business concept to investors".

There was also a premiere to celebrate: The Swiss Cause of Health Cohort (COHCOH) was officially launched during the event. During the conference, over 100 delegates started a 14-day blood sugar measurement, for which the data will later be made available to the [SugarandMe](#) project as well as COHCOH. In this way, scientists from the UZH and the ETH are setting a good example and providing data sets that give information about health. This is not a government-led project, according to Co-Initiator, president of the Bio-Technopark Schlieren and ETH Professor Ernst Hafen. He said: "Together with citizens, we are setting an example, ensuring that data remains firmly in the hands of the participants", Hafen explains.

Innovation for data collection

The main thrust of the event was clear: It is necessary to develop sound digital applications and obtain data at times when people are in good health in order to place a stronger focus on maintaining health. To this end, data on lifestyle and environmental conditions is particularly crucial, while genetic information also has an important part to play. The majority of medical

data is, however, collected during periods of illness. Nevertheless, the range of digital health care solutions and the collection of data this entails is rapidly rising. Professor Claudia Witt from the University Hospital Zurich reveals that there are around 300,000 health care apps available to download from the App Store, although only a fraction of these have been tested in terms of their efficacy. With the help of science, this should change. For example, the presentation given by EPFL Professor Marcel Salathé about Food&You, a Swiss project on personalized nutrition that is managed digitally, showed how data will in future be efficiently collected with the help of Artificial Intelligence (AI). In order to analyze eating habits, participants are instructed to upload photos of their meals into an app, which identifies the food with the help of AI. Typically for projects of this kind, teams of an interdisciplinary nature with extensive IT expertise are required.

How complex the technical implementation of digital health applications can be, was underlined in the presentation by Tavpritesh Sethi from the Indraprastha Institute for Information Technology in Delhi, India. According to Sethi, digital solutions are the future in the health sector, but a lot of research is still needed to develop their full potential, which requires social elements such as empathy in addition to technical sophistication.

Medicine Hub Zurich is ready to go

In the field of health research, there are large-scale cooperation projects in which Zurich institutions are involved. For example, the University of Zurich is part of the DO-HEALTH study, the largest of its kind in Europe on the subject of healthy ageing. Since 2012, the study has collected data from 2157 healthy individuals aged 70 and over from five European countries and examined their prevention strategies. The results are to be presented this year. "Among other things, it is striking how an active life with exercise can maintain health and even reduce the mortality rate. The effect is even positive if it is started at an advanced age", states USZ Professor and geriatric expert Heike A. Bischoff-Ferrari

The conference discussed suggestions for apps, for example in the area of healthy aging. Intensive research is being conducted in this field at the University of Zurich in a European network. The conference also left the attendees in no doubt with regard to the growing popularity of focusing on health, with representatives from medical and insurance industries in addition to those from patient organizations declaring their support for this approach.

This solidarity is needed in these complex questions, because: "You don't consume health - innovation is needed," said Sven Hirsch. The co-organizer of the conference and head of the ZHAW Digital Health Lab pleaded for an approach that is strongly human-centered, especially if it is technology-based. With this in mind, the medical hub in Zurich is rising to the challenge, concluded Professor Beatrice Beck Schimmer, Partner of the conference and Vice President Medicine of the University of Zurich. "To this end, we are maintaining the scientific research network and are looking for partners from the health care system. Together, we can gain the trust of people for new solutions".

Yvonne von Hunnius / CaféEurope Nachrichtenagentur AG