

Retinal Implant for the Blind: Successful Financing Round with EUR 4.5 million

Bonn, Germany, 19 March 2004. Bonn-based medical technology specialist IIP-Technologies GmbH announced today the successful close of a new financing round including the PolyTechnos Venture-Partners Funds as lead investor and the Swiss electronics manufacturer Valtronic. The funding will allow IIP to carry on with its current clinical trials and launch the first vision-enhancing medical product world-wide aimed at retinal degenerations presumably by 2006.

IIP-Technologies develops a learning neuro-implant for degenerative diseases of the human retina such as Retinitis Pigmentosa and Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD) – diseases which gradually lead to blindness and for which no effective therapy or cure has been found to date. The company, having been financed by an U.S.-American consortium up to now, is currently conducting its first clinical trial as a multi-centre study in four leading university hospitals in Germany and Austria. The new financing round will allow IIP to finalise the acute trial in order to determinate the ideal parameters for the future implant and to initiate the upcoming long-term trial that will be the basis for the Europe-wide product launch. Additionally, the European Union will continue to support the Learning Retina Implant through a EUR 1.6 million grant as part of the “Healthy Aims” project within the 6th Framework Programme.

The Learning Retina Implant will provide blind people suffering from retinal degenerations with limited vision that will allow them to move freely in unfamiliar surroundings. The first product generation aims at patients with Retinitis Pigmentosa, a hereditary disease that affects more than a 100,000 people in the EU. Its first symptom is night blindness, caused by the selective loss of retinal rods. In later stages, retinal cells degenerate from the periphery towards the centre of the visual field, which leads to tunnel vision and ultimately to blindness. Later product generations will also be suitable for patients with AMD. AMD occurs much more frequently and is in fact considered to be the main reason for blindness in the industrialised world. The late stages of the dry form, which can be treated by the Learning Retina Implant, affect more than two million people in the EU.

The product’s market potential clearly convinced Munich-based PolyTechnos, a leading European venture capital firm with long standing experience in the life science and technology sector, as well as Swiss-based miniaturisation expert corporation Valtronic, whose skills in medical technology will form the basis for a strategic partnership.

George A. Williams, M.D., a renowned retina expert from the Beaumont Eye Institute, Royal Oak, Michigan, U.S., and adviser to the U.S.-American consortium, commented: “I view IIP’s technology as the superior and most complete one to solve the complex challenge of reconstituting the visual capability of patients with degenerative retinal diseases.” Wolfgang Oster, Managing Partner with PolyTechnos Venture-Partners and Georges Rochat, President of Valtronic, added: “We are convinced that the management team of IIP with Steffen Suchert at its helm will lead this much-needed technology to the market and change medical practice to the benefit of blind patients.”

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Backgrounder

About IIP-Technologies

IIP-Technologies GmbH is a medical technology specialist based in Bonn, Germany. The company's aim is to develop and market a Learning Retina Implant for therapy of retinal degenerations such as Retinitis Pigmentosa and Age-Related Macular Degeneration. The company wants to contribute actively to improve blind peoples' quality of life. By merging innovative technologies from the fields of medical technology, information technology and micro-system technology, a new class of active medical devices has been created that will allow blind people to regain modest visual perceptions. The company was founded in 2002 and currently employs approx. 30 people. A quality management system according to ISO 9001:2000 and EN 13485 has been implemented.

About the Learning Retina Implant

The Learning Retina Implant consists of external and implantable components. The patient wears a pair of glasses with an integrated camera chip, a wireless signal, and an energy transmission system as well as a pocket processor approximately the size of a walkman containing a microcomputer and rechargeable batteries. The input from the camera is processed and transmitted to the implanted component inside the patient's eye. The actual implant consists of a flexible film with microelectronics for signal reception as well as a multitude of miniaturised electrodes for retinal stimulation. The patient will be able to optimise his or her visual perceptions after the implantation in a computer-aided dialogue.

About PolyTechnos Venture-Partners

PolyTechnos Venture-Partners is an independent European venture capital firm focusing on early to expansion stage, technology and life science investments predominantly in German-speaking Europe. Areas of expertise comprise Diagnostics & MedTech, Drug Development, Information Technology & Communications, Industrial & Engineering, Energy and the respective interfaces. PolyTechnos helps companies turn technology into business by providing support in areas such as strategy, business development, and organisation building. PolyTechnos, located in Munich, Germany, was founded in 1998 and currently advises funds totalling approximately EUR 200 million.

About Valtronic

Valtronic is a Swiss-based contract manufacturer specialised in miniature electronic modules with facilities in Switzerland, the U.S. and Morocco. The company was founded in 1982. Valtronic's customer list includes worldwide well-established Original Equipment Manufacturers working in niche fields requiring miniaturisation within their assemblies. Markets served include the medical field (incl. AIMD products), measurement and various niche markets.

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