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UK MEDICAL DEVICE MANUFACTURING

- AN INVALUABLE RESOURCE

The value of medical manufacturing to the UK economy cannot be overstated: the industry employs around 60,000* people, is valued at Euro seven billion and, indeed, it impacts us all at some time during our lives.

With over 150 exhibitors, this year's MEDTEC UK medical device manufacturing show and Conference (Birmingham NEC, 13-14 February) will provide an intriguing insight into the industry with, in some cases, displays of precision engineering, packaging, automation assembly and plastics technology, for example, illustrating the typical route from design through manufacturing to delivery that is taken by some of the 500,000 or so different healthcare products available globally.

The UK is the largest medical manufacturing country in Europe, according to Eucomed – the ‘voice’ of Europe’s medical technology industry. Based in Brussels, Eucomed represents 4,500 designers, manufacturers and suppliers of medical technology used in the diagnosis, prevention, treatment and amelioration of disease and disability.

The UK accounts for 20 per cent of the 11,000 European companies involved in medical technology - of which more than 80 per cent are small and medium-sized firms and employ around 435,000 people.

In total, Europe accounts for revenues of Euro 63.6 billion (2005 figures), from the global medical technology pot of Euro 187 billion, which equates to just over six per cent of Europe’s total healthcare expenditure.

The European medical technology market is growing at the rate of five to six per cent per annum and the UK is the fourth largest market in Europe, representing 11 per cent, behind Germany (the largest), France and Italy. The UK imports and exports a similar amount of medical technology, valued in each case at around Euro 5.6 million.

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Europe spends about eight per cent of Gross Domestic Product on

healthcare, with medical technology accounting for 0.55 per cent of that.

A 'medical device', says the EU Medical Devices Directive (93/42/EEC) is "any instrument, apparatus, appliance, material or other article, whether used alone or in combination, including the software necessary for its proper application intended by the manufacturer to be used for humans for the purpose of:

[] Diagnosis, prevention, monitoring, treatment or alleviation of disease

[] Diagnosis, monitoring, treatment, or alleviation of or compensation for an injury or handicap

[] Investigation, replacement or modification of the anatomy or of a physiological process

[] Control of conception

...and which does not achieve its principal intended action in or on the human body by pharmacological, immunological or metabolic means, but which may be assisted in its function by such means".

Whether bandages, contact lenses, life-support machines, orthopaedic

shoes, pacemakers, spectacles, surgical instruments, syringes or wheelchairs, medical device manufacturing is characterised by a constant flow of innovation where a product has a typical lifecycle of only 18 months before an improved product/version becomes available.

This explains why between three and six per cent of total medical technology revenue is spent on research and development, and it's why manufacturing processes and strategies have to be flexible and very responsive.

In turn, this impacts every aspect of the manufacturing chain – from design and product test/prototype through the production sequence (and also, of course, sales and marketing) so, by definition, production equipment and resource has to be inherently easy and cost-effective to 'adapt' to new requirements. This is in stark contrast to the pharmaceutical industry, which is characterised by long-run, long-term product amortisation.

Importantly, as part of Eucomed's representation of the industry, one of its key recommendations is that any new European Directive or Regulation should be 'innovation friendly'.

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To date, it says, much of the success and growth of the European

medical devices industry has been due to the flexibility afforded by the three New Approach Directives.

These have essentially addressed requirements from the point of view of managing risks and ensuring the intended performance of medical devices without imposing strict, detailed technical requirements. These can be shown to have resulted in a high level of innovation of technologies and products without compromising patient safety.

Given that medical innovation is continuing rapidly and that there is an increasing trend towards convergence of technologies such as advanced materials science, cell and tissue biology, IT and nanotechnology, Eucomed also strongly emphasises the importance of ensuring that any future Directives/Regulations are as flexible as possible regarding innovation. Also, that they promote a variety of technical solutions while remaining robust enough to guarantee patient safety and effective performance of medical technology products.

With this in mind, the exhibitors and speakers at the MEDTEC UK show and conference represent an unrivalled showcase of an industry where continual progress is a by-word.

*Figures based on OECD, Eucomed member associations, Medistat and Eucomed calculations. Visit www.eucomed.org for details.

[] MEDTEC UK is co-located with five other manufacturing-focused shows at the Birmingham NEC on 13-14 February 2008 - all presenting money-saving technologies and tools for more effective and efficient manufacturing operations: MTEC Sensors, Measurement & Instrumentation, Machine Building Drives & Automation, IPOT – image processing and optical technology, 3C Contamination Control & Cleanroom Products and Practical Vacuum & Semiconductor Processing.

exhibitor lists and Conference/education programmes, and to register for your free entry ticket as well online links to all exhibition websites.

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