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VDMA sets up a new working group for medical technology

Düsseldorf, 11 March 2014. – The new Medical Technology Working Group in the VDMA has been launched, with more than 80 members already. “We are deeply gratified by this excellent response, which shows we are catering to a real need”, says Harald Preiml, the freshly appointed Chairman of the new group speaking at the foundation proceedings in Düsseldorf on 11 March 2014.

Besides classical production technology manufacturers, it is also vendors of components installed in medical end-products, relevant research institutes and companies venturing the step up from a machinery producer to a vendor of medical technology products that are interested in becoming members of the working group, which is also keen to welcome customers for medical technology and the doctors themselves.

The declared aim of the working group is to offer a shared platform themed around production equipment and product development for the medical technology sector. “A dialogue between the mechanical engineering people,

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doctors and medical technology manufacturers has hitherto not been adequately progressed”, comments Harald Preiml. “We aim to change this, and get all the parties involved in the value creation chain sitting round the same table, so as to achieve the optimum for everyone concerned and ultimately for the patients themselves.” The challenges, he added, are many and various, and can best be mastered using an interdisciplinary approach. New solutions have to be developed by harnessing both the professional expertise of the doctors, who understand the requirements involved and the parameters of patients’ acceptance, and the knowledge of what’s technically possible and of scientific research results.

There are 14 associations in the VDMA involved in this working group: namely drive systems, electrical automation, fluid technology, plastics and rubber machines, lasers for material processing, metrological and testing equipment, microsystems technology, food and packaging machinery, surface technology, high-precision tools, robotics and automation, software, textile machinery and machine tools.

These associations all serve the medical technology customer sector. The machine tool manufacturers provide the production technology required for manufacturing prostheses and implants, surface technology specialists, for example, assure the necessary bio-compatibility. While micro-technology is driving the increasing miniaturisation of medical technology products, software vendors enable customised parts to be manufactured on the basis of individual patients’ data, and the doctors are supported by intelligent assistance systems. In addition, software controls highly complex medical devices, which in their turn incorporate many components from the fields of drive systems and fluid technology. The expertise of the injection moulding machine manufacturers is utilised to enhance the production processes for disposable medical articles or complex parts made of plastic. In the field of medical technology, moreover, 3D printing offers new potential for customising implants.

Platform for production technology

Supplying the exceptionally demanding medical technology sector, however, also demands a lot of commitment from the equipment vendors, as well as abundant staying power: any firm wishing to sell its services and products in this sector has to tailor its organisational structure to the complex processes and legal framework conditions applying for the customers involved. When it comes to producing prostheses or implants, for example, the challenge consists of manufacturing customised parts as cost-efficiently as in a series production process. Moreover, validated production processes are required, enabling all the relevant quality requirements to be met.

The working group intends to address these and other issues, and provide the appropriate support. The activities will focus initially on positioning and publicising the new platform among the relevant target groups, with intensive communication of its specialised competence. It will also be expeditiously entering into a dialogue with the research partners involved, and together with the members will be defining the major issues for the work programme concerned.