

Press release

Walloon Region approves proton therapy research program involving five Walloon universities

€49 million for Proton Therapy research

On Thursday 13 December 2018, the Walloon Government approved €49 million of funding to finance the Walloon and Brussels proton therapy center which will combine research, treatment and technological development. This project brings together all Walloon universities and six Walloon and Brussels hospitals, and IBA.

Proton therapy is considered to be the most advanced form of radiotherapy in the fight against cancer. Its unique treatment method makes it possible to target the tumor more efficiently than other treatments. The protons deposit most of their energy within a controlled zone and, in the vast majority of cases, limit the amount of the dose deposited in the healthy tissue surrounding the tumor. This gives the protons the potential to reduce the side effects of the treatment and the risk of radiation-induced cancers. This technology is spreading rapidly around the world and could benefit around 20% of patients treated by radiotherapy if there were a sufficient number of centers.

The Walloon and Brussels proton therapy center will, in particular, enable research and development in the preclinical, clinical and technological fields, as well as the treatment of patients from hospital networks in Belgium and abroad. The project is financed by €49 million from the Wallonia Region and falls within the framework of a Technological Innovation Partnership involving the founding universities and the Walloon based company IBA, the world's leading provider of proton therapy solutions, situated in Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium. IBA was selected as the preferred vendor for this project following a comprehensive public tender process. The Free University of Brussels (L'Université Libre de Bruxelles - ULB), the University of Liège (ULiège), the University of Mons (UMons), the University of Namur (UNamur) and IBA have put together a research program that will focus on three areas - technology, biology and medicine - to increase knowledge of the physical and biological benefits of proton therapy, further improve existing technologies and encourage synergies with other therapeutic methods or diagnostic tools. The Catholic University of Louvain (UCLouvain) will also participate in complementary research programs within the Walloon proton therapy center in collaboration with the other project partners.

The Minister for the Economy and Research, Pierre-Yves Jeholet, said: "I am delighted with the progress and unifying nature of this important project for Wallonia. The region has become the world leader in the field of proton therapy thanks to its universities, researchers, and industries such as IBA and its numerous sub-contractors. We hope to retain and extend our leadership in this cutting-edge technology."

Olivier Chastel, President of the MR, added: "With regard to the health challenges and the hopes for a cure that proton therapy offers patients, it seemed important for Wallonia to be able to rely on a center in its own territory. With this second proton therapy center in Belgium, a greater number of patients will be able to benefit from one of the most advanced technologies to date for the treatment of cancer."

The company ProtonW.be was also created to manage the center. There are ten members comprising the four founding universities together with six hospitals: the Centre Hospitalier Universitaire of Mons-Borinage (CHUPMB, Mons), the Centre Hospitalier de Liège (CHU Liège), the Centre Hospitalier Tivoli (CHU Tivoli, La Louvière), the Grand Hôpital de Charleroi (GHDC), the Hôpital Erasme and the Intercommunale de Santé Publique du Pays de Charleroi (ISPPC). The ISPPC has set aside a budget of €12 million to build the center that will accommodate the Proteus®ONE solution. This will be situated adjacent to the Hôpital Civil Marie-Curie – C.H.U. de Charleroi. The Intercommunale is particularly proud that this proton therapy center, a showcase of the therapeutic equipment in modern radiology, will be the go-to center in the treatment of patients from all over Wallonia. IBA will supply the Proteus®ONE and as a research partner.

Olivier Legrain, Chief Executive Officer of IBA, said: “We are very excited about the forthcoming creation of a development center for proton therapy in Wallonia. All the scientific, clinical and technological skills are there to take this important technology forward in the fight against cancer. This new research center is strategically important, not only because it will enable IBA and the Walloon universities to experiment with and develop the new-generation technologies to fight cancer, but it will also help in the treatment of more Belgian patients with proton therapy, significantly improving their quality of life.”

Everything is now in place to make the Walloon and Brussels proton therapy center a center of excellence for research, development and the treatment of patients by proton therapy.

Paul Magnette, Burgomaster of Charleroi, added: “I am very happy that the City of Charleroi is hosting the Walloon and Brussels proton therapy center, as well as the teams of researchers from five universities. The new center will strengthen the scientific hub already present in Charleroi and allow a clear link between the Biopark and the Carolos hospital institutions of the GHdC and the ISPPC. It is our hope that the Biopark teams will integrate the research projects of the proton therapy center to create new synergies which will be of benefit to patients. For patients treated using proton therapy, the proximity of a center is critical because of the four to eight week treatment duration. Basing the center in Walloon allows it to be easily accessible for the entire population of the region.”

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About IBA

IBA (Ion Beam Applications S.A.) is a global medical technology company focused on bringing integrated and innovative solutions for the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. The company is the worldwide technology leader in the field of proton therapy, considered to be the most advanced form of radiation therapy available today. IBA's proton therapy solutions are flexible and adaptable, allowing customers to choose from universal full-scale proton therapy centers as well as compact, single room solutions. In addition, IBA also has a radiation dosimetry business and develops particle accelerators for the medical world and industry. Headquartered in Belgium and employing about 1,500 people worldwide, IBA has installed systems across the world.

IBA is listed on the pan-European stock exchange NYSE EURONEXT (IBA: Reuters IBAB.BR and Bloomberg IBAB.BB). More information can be found at: www.iba-worldwide.com

About Proteus®ONE

Proteus®ONE is the compact intensity modulated proton therapy (IMPT) solution from IBA. It benefits from the latest technologies developed with renowned clinical institutions. Proteus®ONE is smaller, more affordable, easier to install and to operate. It is ultimately easier to finance, making this advanced radiation therapy modality available to more institutions and patients worldwide. Proteus®ONE makes proton therapy easy. Proteus®ONE is the brand name of Proteus®235.