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EU to fund 5.9 million euros towards Anglo-French project that will develop new smart wheelchair and training programme for users and healthcare professionals

Sixteen organisations³ from the UK and France, including several NHS Trusts, are coming together to launch a project that will help tackle mobility problems faced by elderly and disabled people, by developing a new smart electronic powered wheelchair and virtual reality wheelchair simulator.

The project, led by the French based graduate school of engineering, ESIGELEC, will receive 5.9 million euros from the EU funded Interreg France (Channel) England programme.

The project, called ADAPT (Assistive Devices for Empowering Disabled People Through Robotic Technologies), will enhance standard electronic powered wheelchairs, which are currently used by health services in the UK and France, by adding driving assistance technologies such as obstacle avoidance, route selection and autonomous driving.

The smart electronic powered wheelchair will also report on the user's health by sending real-time information via the internet, enabling healthcare professionals to monitor any changes in the user's health.

ADAPT will also produce an electronic powered wheelchair simulator based on virtual reality for new users, giving them the opportunity to practice before using the new smart wheelchairs. Additional training on the new systems will also be provided for healthcare professionals to address a current gap in healthcare education and better understand and manage user rehabilitation.

In total the project could reach up to 300,000 electric wheelchair users in the Channel area and help train more than 15,000 healthcare professionals.

The provision of smart and adaptable electronic powered wheelchairs is an important step in ensuring elderly and disabled people are able to access local facilities and services which will help improve their social inclusion. This is particularly relevant with the number of people aged 65 or over in the European Union expected to double over the next 50 years to 151 million people in 2060⁵.

The project will also have an additional economic benefit on the cross-border Channel area² with around 60 companies benefiting from the manufacturing of components for both the smart wheelchair and the simulator.

Commenting on the project's approval Nicolas Ragot, from the lead partner ESIGELEC said: *"The project is an important response to the socio-economic issues faced by elderly and disabled people.*

Sixteen partners with a range of different skills have come together around a three pronged approach of research, training and transfer of technology.

ADAPT will develop innovative assistive technologies by integrating new robot technology into an electronic powered wheelchair. Training modules targeted at healthcare professionals will also be created.

Finally, the project will share these technologies with businesses, helping to create a leverage effect on the economic development of this border region.”

The project budget will total 8.7 million euros with 69% funded by the Interreg France (Channel) England programme, representing a European Regional Development Fund contribution of 5.9 million euros. The project is made up of 16 organisations, 8 from France and 8 from the UK, and will last four years.

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For further information, please contact:

Titus Carey, France (Channel) England Communications Officer: 07452 924 800

Notes to Editors

1. The Interreg FCE Programme is a European Territorial Cooperation programme that aims to fund high quality cooperation projects in the Channel border region between France and England. It focuses on a range of specific objectives including supporting innovation, improving the attractiveness of the FCE area and developing low carbon technologies. The Programme has a total of €223million of ERDF funds to distribute by 2023 and is managed by Managing Authority Norfolk County Council.
2. The Programme operates within a clearly defined eligible area, covering the South and East Coasts of England from Cornwall to Norfolk, and the North Coast of France from Finistère to Pas-de-Calais. The full programme area can be found [here](#).
3. Project Partners:
 - *Lead Partner – ESIGELEC*
 - Institut National des Sciences Appliqués de Rennes (France)
 - University of Picardie Jules Verne (France)
 - Pole Saint Helier (France)
 - Centre Hospitalier Universitaire – Hôpitaux de Rouen (France)
 - Breizh Paralyisie Cérébrale (France)
 - Ergovie (France)
 - Pole Transactions Electroniques Sécurisées (France)
 - University of Kent (UK)
 - University College London (UK)
 - Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust (UK)
 - Cornwall Mobility (UK)
 - Canterbury Christ Church University (UK)
 - East Kent Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (UK)
 - Health and Europe Center (UK)

- Kent Surrey Sussex Academic Health Science Network (UK)
4. Project approval is subject to the Grant Offer Letter being signed
 5. 'European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing': Population 85 million in 2008 and estimated to reach 151 million in 2060.