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European Union Negotiates Wearable Health Monitor Research

The European Union is in the final stages of negotiating a \$16 million research effort to develop wearable health monitors, which could expand health care coverage and decrease the cost of monitoring conditions such as diabetes, cardiac problems, high-risk pregnancies and stress, Electronic Engineering Times reports. At a conference in Cancun, Mexico, last week, as many as 17 papers detailed these and other prototype systems using handheld devices, low-power sensors and wireless networks.

The European Commission is working with private companies on three future projects—a cardiac monitoring system from Philips, a sensor “garment” from Italian company Smartex and a mask that detects neural stress based on facial expressions.

Philips’ My Heart system will be used to monitor, diagnose and treat heart conditions such as arrhythmia. The 45-month project could begin in January and includes a group of electronics, medical and textile companies, said Josef Lauter, a principal scientist at Philips Research. The Smartex project will follow up on the company’s Wealthy system, a wearable garment that contains sensors and electrodes knitted into traditional materials. The Wealthy system is not expected to be used commercially, but the next stage of the product will contribute to the EC’s initiative, according to Smartex’s Rita Paradiso.

Ericsson created its MobiHealth system based on a personal digital assistant that links to sensor networks on the body and communicates with physicians through cellular networks. A three-month project will track about 25 patients with a variety of conditions and should be completed in February.

While it’s difficult to predict the growth of wearable health-monitoring systems, research into the systems will be “exponential” during the next five years,

according to Paolo Bonato, director of the motion analysis lab at Harvard Medical School's Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital (Merritt, Electronic Engineering Times, 9/22).

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