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Rotterdam

Beating Heart of Holland's Medical Sector

A young and dynamic city that is constantly evolving, Rotterdam might not be the first name that comes to mind when choosing a conference destination in Holland—but it soon will be. Skyscrapers, an impressive port, famous museums, hip restaurants and food markets are the result of the can-do mentality of the people of Rotterdam. What is perhaps lesser known is that Rotterdam is increasingly contributing to the development of life sciences and health worldwide, drawing the attention of European and international associations to the city with exciting new discoveries in these fascinating sectors.

WORDS RÉMI DÉVÉ



Home to the largest port in Europe and ninth-largest in the world, Rotterdam is often regarded as the industrial powerhouse of Holland. Yet, this is also a vibrant, modern city that was almost completely rebuilt after WWII. Located just 26 minutes by train from Schiphol International Airport and boasting its own international airport (Rotterdam The Hague), this buzzing metropolis on the border of the river Maas offers a wide array of convention venues and an extensive public transport network, in addition to a breathtaking skyline. The fact that the city is home to more than 170 nationalities also helps create an open and cosmopolitan atmosphere.

Beyond its awe-inspiring architecture, its creative spirit and its port, Rotterdam is a frontrunner in the life sciences and health sector. The success of the aptly-named Medical Delta, which the city belongs to, alongside Delft and Leiden, is testament to this. An impressive cluster of world-renowned institutions (the largest in the Netherlands when it comes to life sciences), the Medical Delta combines the strengths of three leading universities, two teaching hospitals and three incubators, proving the region of West Holland is fertile ground for innovative entrepreneurship, as well as an excellent pool of talent.

Innovative Health Hub

Rotterdam's contribution to the life sciences and health sector includes top medical facilities and knowledge centres such as Erasmus MC, which excels in various research fields with a focus on fundamental and clinical domains, as well as public health and prevention. As one of the ten best medical institutes in Europe, Erasmus MC focuses on acute and complex care, relying heavily on specialist knowledge, innovation of care and prevention. Those tasks are directly linked to research in which fundamental, translational and clinical research are represented, resulting in quality improvement and more efficient patient care.

Together with the Erasmus Centre for Entrepreneurship (ECE), LIFE Rotterdam Consortium and the Municipality of Rotterdam, Erasmus MC was at the heart of the initiative of the Life Sciences & Health Hub launched last year. A true living lab, the Hub offers entrepreneurs, scientists and health-care institutions the opportunity to find each other, develop new life sciences and health innovations, and experience and test these practices with patients and clients. It is perfectly in line with the Technology Transfer Office of the Erasmus MC, which is all about the valorisation of knowledge and the application of science to medical practice and commercial innovation.

Rotterdam in a nutshell

- 630,000 inhabitants
- Second largest city in the Netherlands
- Europe's largest port
- Capacity of largest auditorium: 10,500 pax
- New Rotterdam Ahoy Convention Centre (RACC) slated for 2020, with largest auditorium in the Netherlands
- More than 8,000 hotel rooms in the greater Rotterdam area
- Home to an international airport / Schiphol International Airport located only 26 minutes by train

Thijs Spigt, director of the Technology Transfer Office at Erasmus MC, puts it like this: *"The Hub supports mainly scientists, but also employees in the medical sector—like nurses for instance— who have an innovative idea. Ideas can range from a new medicine to a 'car-wash' for hospital beds. We help protect knowledge, look for cooperation partners, and find the right funding to launch a product to the market or bring it to patients' homes. One of those ways is by starting a new venture; these startups are facilitated in the incubator and are now also in the new Life Sciences & Health Hub."*

"The Life Sciences & Health Hub comes to life with programmes such as 'Get Started', one in which early-stage entrepreneurs with ideas in the life sciences area are supported to turn their ideas into an actual business and scale it. Startups, as well as established SME companies, are involved with programmes in the Hub," adds Martin Luxemburg, director of the Erasmus Centre for Entrepreneurship.

The Life Sciences & Health Hub is located within Rotterdam Science Tower, a multi-company building combining lab space, offices and facilities for laboratory education. The Tower also houses LabHotel, a concept that allows researchers and

companies to make use of laboratory facilities, and, further in the south of the city, on the premises of the Maasstad Hospital, there is the 'Zorgboulevard', a one-stop location for all aspects of health and wellbeing.

Altogether, according to recent research, more than 150 life sciences and health companies are located in and around Rotterdam, making the life sciences and health sector one of the main employers of the city, as well as one of its most important economic sectors.

Generation R Next

Rotterdam's dynamism can be witnessed in various fields of endeavours. Paediatrics is one of them, where many important and long-term studies are conducted. A prime example is the Generation R Study, a prospective cohort study from foetal life until young adulthood in a multi-ethnic urban population.

Vincent Jaddoe, Professor Paediatric Epidemiology and Paediatrician at Erasmus MC, works at the Sophia Children's Hospital and led the bid for the 2017 World Congress on Developmental Origins of Health and Disease, which took place at De Doelen International Congress Centre in 2017. He explains: *"The Generation R study is designed to identify early environmental and genetic causes of normal and abnormal growth, development and health from foetal life until young adulthood. Eventually, the results from the study will contribute to the development of strategies for optimising health and healthcare for children and pregnant women. In the Generation R Next, we go one step further and study the health and lifestyle of a mother-to-be before pregnancy and the effects on the growth and development of her child."*

Erasmus MC conducts over 80 projects funded by the European Commission, 70 of which are Horizon 2020 projects and include collaborations with partners from 56 countries. Professor Jaddoe states: *"Bibliometric indicators place Erasmus MC in the top of clinical medicine worldwide. In addition to scientific research, patient care and education are core tasks of the centre. It is the top referral institution for a region of about five million inhabitants, as well as one of the largest medical schools in the Netherlands, with around 3,500 medical students and 258 PhD graduates in 2016. Together, the students and 13,000 employees at Erasmus MC improve the individual patient care and public health of tomorrow, which says a lot about the kind of knowledge to be found in Rotterdam!"*

Type 1 Diabetes

Another area of excellence in Rotterdam is diabetes research, particularly treating children affected by this disease. For example, Diabeter, a specialised treatment centre for type 1 diabetes in kids and young adults, is the largest institution of this scale in the European Union.

Dr. H.J. Veeze, Paediatrician and Diabetologist, explains: *"The care for children and young adults with type 1 diabetes deserves a specialised treatment centre with a complete focus*



on type 1 diabetes. It is this focus that enables us to provide optimal care for young people who grow up with this chronic disease. Diabeter does not only provide care, it also plays an active role in making this care better. We do this by participating in scientific research that is aimed at giving the target group a life without diabetes complications. In the end, this must lead to a definitive cure for type 1 diabetes."

In the centre, all staff—including nurses, interns, paediatricians, dieticians, and psychologists—focus on this care, and on this care only. "When your 'flight hours' are more focused, you get more experienced; deliver safer care; and act far more cost efficiently. This is reflected in the best outcome that will impact people globally, a very low hospital admission rate and, for the patients, greater value for money in the short term, as well as in the long run, since the risk of amputations, blindness, kidney failure and more are reduced drastically," Dr. Veeze adds. It hardly comes as a surprise, then, that Diabeter received the Value Based Health Care Prize from Michael Porter from Harvard University in 2017.

Praising the value of Rotterdam as a centre of excellence – thus the perfect location for life sciences-related conferences – Dr. Veeze says Rotterdam has adjectives like "innovative" and "cutting-edge" written all over it. "Rotterdam has

"Rotterdam was a natural choice for our next international ICHOM conference in May 2019. The Netherlands is a leading light in the adoption of value-based healthcare and Rotterdam is the home of Erasmus Medical Center, our first strategic alliance partner. We look forward to welcoming our global community to Rotterdam and working with Erasmus MC and the convention bureau to showcase the progress made worldwide to provide better value for patients, as well as how we can continue to support our network in implementing and measuring outcomes."

**Christina Rångemark Åkerman,
President of the International
Consortium for Health Outcomes Measurement (ICHOM).**

the culture and the right attitude to act in a pioneering manner. It's the kind of place where things change constantly for the better, where innovation has room to grow. I personally believe it's an ideal destination for conferences with the Schiphol International Airport and Rotterdam The Hague Airport being so close, as well as with the city's excellent meeting infrastructure," he says.

Dr. Veeze is not the only one with this mindset. In recent years, Rotterdam has indeed increasingly been selected as the host city for important international congresses related to health and life sciences. In 2018, a number of paediatric conferences will be held in Rotterdam. Furthermore this year several organisations chose Rotterdam to be the host city for their congresses, including the European Society for Paediatric Infectious Diseases (ESPID, 2020) and the European Society for Paediatric Anaesthesiology (ESPA,

2019), while several more bids for other congresses are underway. As Rotterdam continues to make discoveries that will be valuable all across the world, it's only natural that the world would want to meet there.

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