

Sustainability

With Dr. Anja Segschneider, Rainer Schultheis, Prof. Dr. Christian Johner

Transcript

00:00:05 Speaker 1

Medical Device Insights, a podcast by the Juna Institute for medical device manufacturers, authorities and notified bodies.

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Today with a different voice.

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My name is Anja Seegschneider and I am a science journalist here at the Juna Institute.

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and in this episode I would like to deal with the topic of sustainability in medical technology.

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For this purpose, I have invited a guest who has been dealing with the topic for a long time.

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Rainer Schultheiß is Managing Director of Saphenus Medical Technology.

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Rainer, would you like to introduce yourself briefly?

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Yes, very much.

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I'm Rainer, as I said, I've been with the company Saphenus Medical Technology for 6 years

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and also founded the company.

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And my direction comes from journalism, from science journalism.

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I have worked for over 20 years at the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation in Austria and as I said, I have been Managing Director at Saphenus Medical Technology for 6 years.

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What does sustainability actually mean?

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Yes, this term comes from the 1980s.

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Harlem Brundland was a prime minister in Denmark, whom he headed at the time, the World Commission on Environment and Development, and she was the first to actually bring this term into the world, and it stands for the fact that development should be carried out in such a way that the needs of today's generations are met, but that the needs of

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future generations, our children and grandchildren, will have the same opportunities to similarly satisfy their needs and also to choose their ultimate lifestyle.

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That's where the term actually comes from and it has actually established itself in our society today.

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How did it come about that you dealt with the topic of sustainability on the corporate side?

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It was clear to me from the beginning how I founded the company, that I wanted to combine this social impact and sustainability with

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into it.

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Why?

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Because I've been dealing with the topic for over 20 years and when I became an entrepreneur, it was clear that I wanted to support it from the beginning, from the beginning in the internal and external perception and in the special case of medical technology, some really basic-oriented things were required, but maybe you can talk about it later, that were necessary to implement sustainability.

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How does it differ

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To implement sustainability in a medical technology company from another company?

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So what are the special features?

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The special features are that there are actually practically or very, very few companies that have implemented this so far and that there are a lot of white spaces where sustainability is not yet applied.

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because, as you know, medical technology and medical devices have a lot to do with regulatory requirements.

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There are many things that lean on the health care system.

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It is, it is generally a market that is not completely free, which is also served by health insurance companies, so to speak, and there

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does it actually mean to rethink sustainability sometimes and to think in an interdisciplinary way, to think epistemologically as well, because when you deal with medicine, when you deal with health, you sometimes get into a difficult situation, for example, how do you actually apply ecological ecological sustainability processes?

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You just mentioned the regulatory framework, I can imagine that sustainability is already quite an obstacle, right?

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That's what they originally thought that the regulation would stand in the way, but it is well known that we as a medical device manufacturer are very, very strongly connected to this according to the new Medical Devices Regulation.

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But we have somehow made a virtue out of necessity.

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It may not always be the most pleasant, the most pleasant area that medical device manufacturers deal with, especially in the startup sector.

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But we said, well, if we deal with standards, if we do quality management, then we also have to deal with the suppliers, for example, and we find out according to which criteria, according to which quality criteria, they actually produce.

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that could also be done with sustainability principles.

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I could also ask him who produced it, under what conditions and with what consumption of resources.

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And so we actually took this regulation to combine it with a sustainability management system.

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And I mean, it is currently known that the European Union

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which has built up a database, where companies also have to present their medical devices.

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And to be honest, I don't see it as uninteresting from a sustainability point of view, the transparency, that you know what you're producing and also the transparency, that you know how to produce it, are not in contradiction to sustainability considerations.

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You talked about transparency, to what extent is transparency related to sustainability?

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I think it's very strong.

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It is necessary to open your doors when it comes to how, for example, under what conditions you have manufactured your medical device, with what resource consumption you have produced your medical device, because only then are these things really comparable.

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I would see it similarly to the preparation of an annual balance sheet, which is also ordered to create a sustainability balance sheet a necessary prerequisite

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in order to really be well positioned in the area of sustainability.

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You also have corresponding projects abroad.

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Could you perhaps briefly tell us about it?

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Yes, not quite ordinary for a young company, we said very, very early on that we wanted to roll out our

core idea as nationally as possible.

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We said we want phantom pain in our area.

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We are a manufacturer of a sensory feedback system.

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We are the developer of the world's first sentient leg prosthesis.

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We want to reduce phantom phantom pain worldwide and if you want to reduce phantom phantom pain worldwide, in some countries you first have to make sure that prosthetic care is available at all.

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Because unfortunately

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In non-developed countries, the rates of amputees who wear prostheses are very, very low.

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An example in Tunisia, where we are currently working, about 10 to 15 percent of amputees are only treated with prosthetics at all.

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That doesn't mean the vast majority of them, most of them are in a wheelchair and you first have to create the conditions to make the care possible.

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And we said from the beginning that we are not doing it in the colonialist style, that prostheses are sent down there and he is cared for, but it is necessary after

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according to the certain structures that prevail in the country.

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This means that we have set up an orthopaedic workshop there under simple conditions and are now trying to create a workflow in a next step that the people on site

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not only provide people there with prosthetic care, but also ensure that they remain prosthetic.

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This means that there is an opportunity for the prosthesis wearer to get help with changes to the prosthesis.

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We also combine this with modern digital upcycling ideas, where there are monitoring tools that make it possible for those affected to contact experts very quickly and directly.

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So, this is one of the projects we have at the moment, away from Europe.

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That means that our current system, which is not always one hundred percent sustainable, has a bit to do with our market, doesn't it?

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In other words, that we can afford it, so to speak.

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You're absolutely right, because it is.

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terrible, but also in Tunisia the prostheses cost very, very much money, almost as much money as here in Europe and no one can afford that with an average income of 3,400 € per month.

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Incidentally, the state cannot afford that either.

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There is simply a need for completely new models, there is also a need for new concepts on how to build a prosthesis,

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And there is also a need for ideas of recycling, for example we use recycled plastic materials to build prosthetic sockets there.

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In other words, new approaches to develop affordable prostheses according to the regions there.

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This is really a completely new approach and it is also very basic-oriented.

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Would you also say that for now patients, we were now very much on the corporate side,

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one of the greater advantages for patients is that such a sustainable product is cheaper or is that not necessarily the case?

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In my opinion, this has enormous advantages for the patient, because on the one hand it continues to meet the requirements of a medical device and at the same time the patient does something for the common good.

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I'll say that if a patient knows that a prosthesis will have a second life and in a country where there is currently no care,

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then he will certainly have a good feeling about the choice of product.

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It's similar to when someone goes to the supermarket and takes an organic product.

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So I see this also for the patient in the sense of being fraught with great advantages.

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You're now saying that you make prostheses, I can imagine that it's perhaps a bit easier with such a product, because with sustainable materials and sustainable supply chains

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would you say that it also depends a bit on the type of product or products you make, to what extent you can really become sustainable with a company?

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Certainly, it also depends on the dangerousness of the medical device, I admit.

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So with the pacemaker, I would probably find it more difficult to apply sustainability, especially in an ecological sense, immediately.

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However, I believe that every company should face this issue.

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It is often perhaps also epistemological and philosophical dialogues that are conducted.

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Where does sustainability end?

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Where is the health well-being of people at stake?

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That's why I think it's very good that the United Nations has set up these Sustainable Development Goals, which are much more general than just ecological backpacks now calculate, where the fight

against poverty and health is at stake.

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This means that anyone can face these tasks.

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And then the question arises, also in communication with society, with civil society, with institutions, how far, how far can I go myself?

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And we are certainly only at the beginning of the discussion in our field of medical technology and medicine.

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Where would you see the limits of sustainability?

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To be honest, in medicine it is of course these questions when it comes to life and death, for example.

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Yes, for example, intensive care treatments.

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I have now heard a very interesting, somewhat peculiar calculation, that a day in the intensive care unit, for example when you are in a coma, costs as much in terms of resources as a whole Caribbean vacation including flight.

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And discussions about it

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If you are prepared to look after someone in the intensive care unit day after day at any price, so to speak, very, very delicate questions, which you should also face, are together with the stakeholders.

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Because then it becomes very difficult to set really objective metrics.

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You have to be very careful not to get into line with questions like:

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how long is someone allowed to live or is it perhaps even so, there is an eco-dictatorship and at a certain point it is no longer allowed to use an intensive care unit.

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These are very, very sensitive questions that I think should be asked with different disciplines, and our industry, medical technology, could also make an important contribution here.

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To be honest, I find that quite exciting, because it's going a bit in the direction of human lives against ecology, but sustainability also means

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social health issues.

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I mean, that's actually just another aspect of sustainability then, isn't it?

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That's right.

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And that's why these Sustainable Development Goals are so important, because they cover all areas and health is a very important contribution.

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You can't just reduce sustainability to ecological sustainability, but there are also boundaries in the social sector and they belong together somehow.

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And

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It is also necessary, and this should also be demanded of sustainability research, to find new metrics that measure prosperity, prosperity indicators and that intertwine with ecological indicators.

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In my opinion, there is certainly still a lot to do, also on the part of basic research.

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What would you say, what would we perhaps need in society as a whole or from the system point of view so that sustainability is also better received in medical technology?

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Transparency, which I have already mentioned, is actually the right way to make things more transparent, in my opinion, even when it comes to regulatory requirements.

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I believe, for example, that one way to achieve sustainability in medical devices could be for an innovation, perhaps a disruptive idea, to become a medical device more quickly.

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Currently, most young companies are struggling with the fact that they

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have never managed to bring medical devices to market.

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This is very unsustainable, because things can actually be on the market and can be received by the patient.

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That would be a point for me, and then, in my opinion, incentives for medical technology companies are also needed from the social side and from the legislative side

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To deal more with these issues of sustainability and if you generally look to Europe when it comes to sustainability reports, then it is clearly going in the direction that now that not only large companies have to do this now, SMEs will also have to draw up mandatory sustainability reports in a few years in the future, so that by then at the latest, this industry must also have thought about this.

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Is there a difference between startups and larger companies?

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it is probably easier for start-ups to invest their company sustainably, right?

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Absolutely.

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So I can only recommend starting as early as possible, sharpening your social impact as early as possible, introducing social metrics, because it helps you to deal with it much more easily as long as you are dynamic and my tip, personal tip is that you can also get very interesting new investors on board with it

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Could have, if you have fulfilled your social metrics, presented your social impact.

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For larger companies, it is increasingly difficult in all areas.

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when it comes to the introduction of such new principles, when it comes to the introduction of social metrics, there is no question about it, this is an even greater challenge.

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Finally, maybe you have tips for sustainability newcomers from medical technology, do you have tips on what to look out for, what to start with.

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In the end, you shouldn't think long about how I can make my product more sustainable, perhaps with more resource-saving methods, but rather look at the SDGs of the United Nations per se and detect the

most important categories that have to do with my product.

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That would be the first way.

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That is, perhaps carry out a categorization with its employees and stakeholders, which SDGs I would like to tackle in particular.

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And then look at developing goals, an MBO, quasi like a normal MBO in companies that also specifically target these SDGs.

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And then, so to speak, the path, the goal, year after year, is to try to go one step further, to live up to this SDG.

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Thank you very much for the interview, Rainer.

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With pleasure.

