

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to welcome you to the 7th International Head-Out Water Immersion Symposium, held for the first time in Estonia.

There are probably not many people in the world who have failed to follow with excitement the Space Odyssey of humankind. Therefore we know that besides conquering new distances and altitudes, spaceflights have always been used also for scientific research.

As a qualified, although not practicing physician, I saw with joy of recognition, when studying the materials of today's conference, that space-based research has found extensive application also in the field of health care and medical rehabilitation. The terminology may sound unfamiliar, but in fact we are talking about elementary physiology. In other words – how does the Earth's gravity affect the functioning of our bodies, and how we, by varying these forces, are able to accelerate, for example, the treatment of injuries.

I am glad to point out that in one of the subjects discussed in today's conference – I am referring to hydrotherapy – the scientists of Tartu University have been in the vanguard at all times.

The first president of the Estonian Academy of Sciences, Karl Shlossmann, created the first institute of the academy to be a bathing therapy research institute. One of the most famous physicians – neurosurgeon Ludvig Puusepp – founded Eastern Europe's first clinic of neurosurgery in 1914-1916 with his colleague and mentor, von Bechterew. He studied and actively used in practical rehabilitation water therapy in Tartu during the first Republic of Estonia. Water immersion studies as well as practices have a long tradition in Estonia.

When we go further back in time, to consider the most famous Estonian scientist, Karl Ernst von

Baer, the discoverer of the human embryonic cell and the father of comparative embryology, we also notice that as an embryologist he studied life in weightlessness! In the mother's womb, we have all bounced against the secure walls of the uterus while also under almost zero gravity.

I have been informed that your research methods have been complemented by new testing technologies, also originating from the University of Tartu, Myoton as well as the underwater EMG from Estonia's good neighbour Finland. In the modern era, every effort has to be made to seek new ways to further improve our health and quality of life. Space researchers have made significant contributions in this area, as can also be said about high-tech companies in Estonia and Scandinavia. I am eager to hear about your future breakthroughs.

As someone who cares a lot about people's health, I wish every bit of luck for the success of your symposium. I hope that by combining your strengths in research competence with developing and implementing novel technologies we can live up to the tradition of Estonian medical science and give our input to the space study programmes in Europe and the world.

Estonia just recently held a practical event involving a large part of the population – Let's Do It! (aimed at cleaning up dumping grounds in the environment). Let's hope that your—our symposium will be instrumental for us to lead a healthier life on our beautiful planet. So that it will always be good to return here, wherever the trip leads us in the universe.

I wish you a very exciting conference and fruitful discussions. And I hope that you will also find some time to walk around in our beautiful university town of Tartu and enjoy the wonderful spring weather.