



# CERN-MEDICIS: A Unique Facility for the Production of Non-Conventional Radionuclides for the Medical Research

Charlotte Duchemin, J.P. Ramos, Thierry Stora, Elodie Aubert, Nadia Audouin, Ermanno Barbero, V. Barozier, A.P. Bernardes, Philippe Bertreix, A Boscher, et al.

## ► To cite this version:

Charlotte Duchemin, J.P. Ramos, Thierry Stora, Elodie Aubert, Nadia Audouin, et al.. CERN-MEDICIS: A Unique Facility for the Production of Non-Conventional Radionuclides for the Medical Research. 11th International Particle Accelerator Conference (IPAC2020), May 2020, Caen, France. pp.THVIR13, 10.18429/JACoW-IPAC2020-THVIR13 . hal-03013154

**HAL Id: hal-03013154**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03013154>**

Submitted on 18 Nov 2020

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

# CERN-MEDICIS: A UNIQUE FACILITY FOR THE PRODUCTION OF NON-CONVENTIONAL RADIONUCLIDES FOR THE MEDICAL RESEARCH

C. Duchemin<sup>1,2</sup>, J. P. Ramos<sup>1,2,\*</sup>, T. Stora<sup>1,†</sup>, E. Aubert<sup>1</sup>, N. Audouin<sup>3</sup>, E. Barbero<sup>1</sup>, V. Barozier<sup>1</sup>, A. P. Bernardes<sup>1</sup>, P. Bertreix<sup>1</sup>, A. Boscher<sup>1</sup>, D. Burnel<sup>1</sup>, R. Catherall<sup>1</sup>, M. Cirilli<sup>1</sup>, E. Chevallay<sup>1</sup>, T. E. Cocolios<sup>2</sup>, J. Comte<sup>1</sup>, B. Crepieux<sup>1</sup>, M. Deschamps<sup>1</sup>, K. Dockx<sup>2</sup>, A. Dorsival<sup>1</sup>, V. N. Fedosseev<sup>1</sup>, P. Fernier<sup>1</sup>, R. Formento-Cavaier<sup>1,3</sup>, V. M. Gadelshin<sup>1,4,5</sup>, S. Gilardoni<sup>1</sup>, J. L. Grenard<sup>1</sup>, F. Haddad<sup>3,6</sup>, R. Heinke<sup>2</sup>, B. Jui<sup>1</sup>, M. Khan<sup>7</sup>, U. Köster<sup>8</sup>, L. Lambert<sup>1</sup>, G. Lilli<sup>1</sup>, G. Lunghi<sup>1</sup>, B. A. Marsh<sup>1</sup>, Y. Martinez Palenzuela<sup>2</sup>, R. Martins<sup>1</sup>, S. Marzari<sup>1</sup>, N. Menaa<sup>1</sup>, N. Michel<sup>3,6</sup>, F. Pozzi<sup>1</sup>, F. Riccardi<sup>1</sup>, J. Riegert<sup>1</sup>, N. Riggaz<sup>1</sup>, S. Rothe<sup>1</sup>, S. Stegemann<sup>2</sup>, Z. Talip<sup>9</sup>, J. Thiboud<sup>1</sup>, N. P. van der Meulen<sup>9</sup>, J. Vollaie<sup>1</sup>, N. T. Vuong<sup>1</sup>, K. Wendt<sup>4</sup>, S. Wilkins<sup>1</sup>,  
on behalf of the CERN-MEDICIS collaboration

<sup>1</sup>CERN, Geneva, Switzerland

<sup>2</sup>KU Leuven, Institute for nuclear and radiation physics, Leuven, Belgium

<sup>3</sup>GIP ARRONAX, Nantes, France

<sup>4</sup>Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz, Germany

<sup>5</sup>Ural Federal University, Yekaterinburg, Russia

<sup>6</sup>SUBATECH, Institut Mines Telecom Atlantique, CNRS/IN2P3, Université de Nantes, France

<sup>7</sup>Pakistan Institute of Nuclear Science and Technology, Islamabad, Pakistan

<sup>8</sup>Institut Laue Langevin, Grenoble, France

<sup>9</sup>Paul Scherrer Institute, Villigen, Switzerland

## Abstract

CERN-MEDICIS (MEDical Isotopes Collected from ISolde) is a facility at CERN (Switzerland) dedicated to the production of non-conventional radionuclides for research and development in imaging, diagnostics and radiation therapy done at partner institutes. It exploits, in a controlled radiation area suited for the handling of unsealed radioactive sources, a target irradiation station positioned between the High Resolution Separator (HRS) ISOLDE target station and its beam dump, a target remote handling system and a dedicated isotope separator beam line. It irradiates targets with the 1.4 GeV Proton Synchrotron Booster (PSB), and also receives activated target materials from external institutes, notably during CERN's Long Shut-Downs. The irradiated target is heated to high temperatures (up to 2300°C) to allow for the release of the isotopes of interest out of the target which are subsequently ionized. The ions are accelerated and the beam is steered through an offline mass separator. The radionuclide batches are, this way, extracted through mass separation and implanted into a thin metallic collection foil up to an energy of 60 keV. After collection, the isotope source is prepared to be dispatched to biomedical research centers (Figure 1).

Since its commissioning in December 2017, the CERN-MEDICIS facility has provided non-conventional medical radionuclides such as Tb-149, Tb-152, Tb-155, Tm-165, Er-169 and Yb-175 with high specific activity, some for the first time, to research institutes and hospitals, being part of the MEDICIS collaboration, for R&D in imaging or treatment [1].

\* Current affiliation: SCK CEN, Mol, Belgium

† Corresponding author: thierry.stora@cern.ch

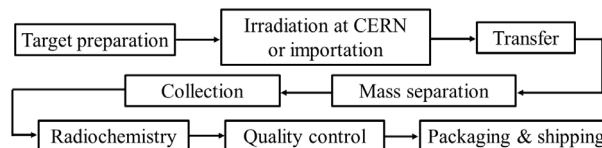


Figure 1: CERN-MEDICIS' steps from target preparation to radioisotopes shipping.

## THE CERN-MEDICIS COLLABORATION

The research program at CERN-MEDICIS is driven by a collaboration agreement between CERN and several partners which includes research institutes, hospitals and universities [1]. The installation has been built as an extension of the ISOLDE facility [2] for research purposes on medical isotopes in view of providing the collaborating institutes with radioisotopes of high specific activity for their research programs [3]. The CERN-MEDICIS scientific program is shaped from the biomedical projects submitted by the members to the Collaboration Board which evaluates the needs of the community and the technical feasibility. The first collection of radionuclides took place in December 2017 at the end of the commissioning period. Since then, the collaboration board approved already 25 proposals. The list of radionuclides of interest once defined is thus re-evaluated at each board, mostly for applications in theranostics, combining diagnosis and therapy. Among them we can find scandium isotopes such as Sc-44 and Sc-47 [4-6]. Sc-44 is of interest for Positron Emission Tomography (PET) and Sc-47 for use in both, therapy and Single Photon Emission Computed Tomography (SPECT). As for Sc-47, Cu-67 is a radionuclide of interest for theranostic



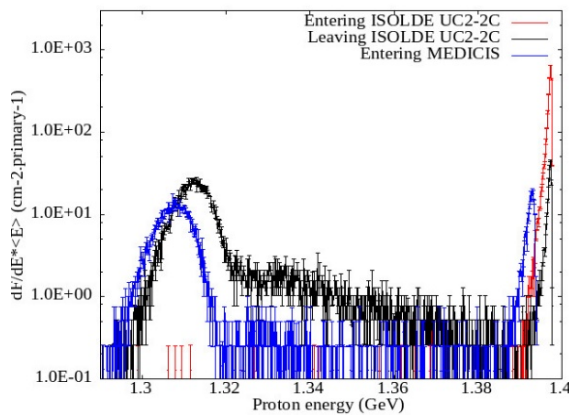


Figure 3: Lethargy representation of the proton fluence spectra at the entrance and the exit of an ISOLDE UC<sub>2</sub>-2C target and at the entrance of a MEDICIS target.



Figure 4: KUKA® robot manipulating a MEDICIS target placed on the rail conveyor system (RCS).

ISOLDE target, the beam is directly stopped in the beam dump. The MEDICIS target takes advantage of these unused protons without impacting the physics program at ISOLDE and acts as a parasitic facility.

Due to an efficient remote handling system, the MEDICIS facility can collect and provide its partner institutes with short-lived medical radionuclides of only a few hours half-lives. After the irradiation it takes on average: (i) 12 min for the RCS to bring the target back from the irradiation point, (ii) 15 min to measure the target's dose rate and install it with the KUKA® robot on the MEDICIS frontend, and finally, (iii) 3 hours to condition the target unit for extraction (vacuum, high voltage and heating). Thus, the MEDICIS facility can start extracting radioisotopes after about 3.5 hours after irradiation of the target. Additionally, in synergy with ISOLDE, targets can also be parasitically irradiated at the MEDICIS irradiation point to produce long-lived radioisotopes and used afterwards on the ISOLDE frontends, thus extending the program with so-called winter physics into CERN's shutdown period, as demonstrated in the recent study of RaF molecules [24].

## USE OF EXTERNAL SOURCES

At the end of 2018 CERN started its Long Shutdown 2 (LS2) for a duration of 2.5 years, during which the CERN accelerators are closed for maintenance. As a consequence,

no proton beams are accelerated for the diverse experimental program until 2021 and, in particular, no targets can be irradiated. CERN-MEDICIS is one of the very few facilities at CERN still operating during LS2, performing off-line mass separation of radionuclides from materials irradiated by external partner institutes such as ARRONAX and ILL.

Feasibility tests with  $^{168}\text{Er}_2\text{O}_3$  targets irradiated at ILL for the separation of Er-169 [25] were performed in 2018, during which a first high specific activity batch of 18 MBq was collected. ARRONAX possesses a high-power cyclotron capable of delivering proton, deuteron and alpha particle beams. To provide CERN-MEDICIS with externally irradiated sources, thin Gd foils are irradiated by 30 MeV protons offering the maximum production cross-section for the generation of Tb-155 through Gd-nat(p,xn) reactions [26]. However, other radioisotopes such as Tb-154 and Tb-156 are co-produced. These radionuclides can only be purified by mass separation in order to supply the research institutes with pure and high specific activity collections of Tb-155. Before being shipped to CERN-MEDICIS the irradiated Gd foils are dissolved and the solution is evaporated on a dedicated sample holder, developed to be rapidly and securely transferred into the target tantalum oven, from which the isotopes are evaporated in order to be ionized and mass separated. In 2019 irradiated target materials were also received from the high flux reactor of the Institut Laue Langevin (ILL) in Grenoble. Prior to the irradiation quartz vials were filled with enriched target materials such as Er-168, Yb-174 and Pt-194. The vials were sealed and irradiated at the ILL high-flux nuclear reactor for the production of radioisotopes via neutron activation. The stable isotopes of the same chemical element present in the enriched material and co-produced impurities, justify the need to perform mass separation to collect the radionuclide of medical interest with the highest purity and specific activity. The decontamination, opening and transfer into the tantalum oven was performed at CERN-MEDICIS, with a dedicated automatic transfer system developed in 2019 to reduce the dose received by the operator and avoid any risk of contamination.

## OPERATION IN 2018 AND 2019

Prior to a collection the target unit is coupled to the MEDICIS target station. The target is heated to very high temperatures, typically above 2000 °C, to allow for the diffusion and effusion of the radionuclides of interest out of the target to an ion source for subsequent ionization. The ions are then accelerated and sent through a mass separator. The MEDICIS target station includes a coupling flange held at a potential usually ranging from 30 kV to 60 kV and a grounded extraction electrode, placed after an acceleration gap ranging from 50 to 100 mm from the ion source exit. An Einzel lens is used to shape the ion beam downstream of the extraction electrode. More information regarding the MEDICIS beam line can be found in Ref. [23]. In addition, the MELISSA (MEDICIS Laser Ion Source for Separator Assembly) laser laboratory [27, 28], in service since April 2019, helps to increase the separation efficiency





Based on the experience and lessons learnt during its 1<sup>st</sup> year, MEDICIS will resume operation with protons in 2021 and continue providing its partner institutes with high specific activity radionuclides, some of them for the first time.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank all colleagues involved in the development and operation of the facility, notably from EN-CV, EN-SMM, EN-STI, EN-HE, EN-DHO, HSE-RP, BE-BI, BE-OP, TE-EPC, TE-VSC CERN's groups and the collaborating institutes. We wish to thank all the members of the CERN-MEDICIS collaboration for their commitment, support and advice. Funding is also acknowledged through the CERN & Society Foundation, the Flanders Research Foundation (FWO), the CERN Knowledge Transfer fund and the European Commission (MEDICIS-Promed, H2020 contract #642889). N. Audouin, F. Haddad and N. Michel acknowledge the support from the ANR Grants: ANR-11-EQPX-0004, ANR-11-LABX-18-01 and ANR-16-IDEX-0007.

## REFERENCES

- [1] CERN-MEDICIS website and list of approved projects: <https://medicis.cern>
- [2] R. Catherall *et al.*, “The ISOLDE facility”, *Journal of Physics G: Nuclear and Particle Physics*, vol. 44, no. 9, p. 094002, 2017.
- [3] R. M. Dos Santos Augusto, L. Buehler, Z. Lawson, S. Marzari, M. Stachura, T. Stora and the CERN-MEDICIS collaboration, “CERN-MEDICIS (MEDical Isotopes Collected from ISolde): a new facility”, *Applied Sciences*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 265-281, 2014.
- [4] S. Huclier-Markai *et al.*, “Promising scandium radionuclides for nuclear medicine: a review on the production and chemistry up to in vivo proofs of concept”, *Cancer Biother Radiopharm.*, vol. 33, no. 8, pp. 316-29, 2018.
- [5] C. Müller *et al.*, “Promising prospects for <sup>44</sup>Sc/<sup>47</sup>Sc-based theragnostics: application of <sup>47</sup>Sc for radionuclide tumor therapy in mice”, *J. Nucl. Med.*, vol. 55, no. 10, pp. 1658-64, 2014.
- [6] C. Muller *et al.*, “Scandium and terbium radionuclides for radiotheragnostics: current state of development towards clinical application”, *Brit. J. Radiol.*, vol. 91, p. 20180074, 2018.
- [7] C. Biggin, M. Harris, A. Hedt and C. Jeffer, “Radiological properties of Next Generation Theranostics (Cu-64/Cu-67)”, *J. Nucl. Med.*, vol. 58, no. suppl. 1, p. 1014, 2017.
- [8] R. Formento-Cavaier *et al.*, “Terbium radionuclides for theragnostics applications: a focus on MEDICIS-Promed”, *Physics Procedia*, vol. 90, pp. 157-163, 2017.
- [9] C. Müller *et al.*, “Alpha-PET with terbium-149: evidence and perspectives for radiotheragnostics”, *EJNMMI Radiopharm. Chem.*, vol. 1, p. 5, 2016.
- [10] C. Müller *et al.*, “Preclinical investigations and first-in-human application of <sup>152</sup>Tb-PSMA-617 for PET/CT imaging of prostate cancer”, *EJNMMI Research*, vol. 9, article no. 68, 2019.
- [11] B. Webster *et al.*, “Chemical Purification of Terbium-155 from Pseudo-Isobaric Impurities in a Mass Separated Source Produced at CERN”, *Scientific Reports*, vol. 9, p. 10884, 2019.
- [12] C Müller *et al.*, “A Unique Matched Quadruplet of Terbium Radioisotopes for PET and SPECT and for  $\alpha$ - and  $\beta$ -Radionuclide Therapy: An In Vivo Proof-of-Concept Study with a New Receptor-Targeted Folate Derivative”, *J. Nucl. Med.* vol. 53, no. 12, pp. 1951-1959, 2012.
- [13] K. Hanke, “Past and Present Operation of the CERN PS Booster”, *International Journal of Modern Physics A*, vol. 28, no. 13, article id. 1330019, 2013.
- [14] U. Köster *et al.*, “Radioisotope production at the high-flux reactor of Institut Laue Langevin”, *Radiotherapy and Oncology*, vol. 102, suppl. 1, pp. S169-S170, 2012.
- [15] F. Haddad *et al.*, “ARRONAX, a high energy and high intensity cyclotron for nuclear medicine”, *Eur. J. Med. Mol. Imaging*, vol. 35 pp.1377-1387, 2008.
- [16] U. Köster, “ISOLDE target and ion source chemistry”, *Radiochimica Acta*, vol. 89, p. 749, 2001.
- [17] G. Battistoni, “Overview of the FLUKA code”, *Annals of Nuclear Energy*, vol. 82, pp. 10-18, 2015.
- [18] T. T. Bohlen *et al.*, “The FLUKA Code: Developments and Challenges for High Energy and Medical Applications”, *Nuclear Data Sheets*, vol. 120, pp. 211-214, 2014, version: 2011-3.0, released 16 Dec. 2019, <https://fluka.cern/>
- [19] C. Theis *et al.*, “Interactive three-dimensional visualization and creation of geometries for Monte Carlo calculations”, *Nucl. Instrum. Methods A*, vol. 562, pp.827-829, 2006.
- [20] J. Donald Cossairt, “Radiation Physics for Personnel and Environmental Protection”, Fermilab, Batavia, IL, USA, Rep. TM-1834, p. 93, 2007.
- [21] J. P. Ramos, “Thick solid targets for the production and online release of radioisotopes: The importance of the material characteristics - A review”, *Nucl. Instrum. Methods B* vol. 463, pp. 201-210, 2020.
- [22] J. P. Ramos *et al.*, “Intense <sup>31-35</sup>Ar beams produced with a nanostructured CaO target at ISOLDE”, *Nucl. Instrum. Methods B*, vol. 320, pp. 83-88, 2014.
- [23] Y. Martinez Palenzuela *et al.*, “The CERN-MEDICIS isotope separator beam line”, submitted for publication.
- [24] R. Garcia Ruiz, R. Berger, J. Billowes *et al.*, “Spectroscopy of short-lived radioactive molecules”, *Nature* vol. 581, pp. 396-400, 2020.
- [25] R. Formento-Cavaier *et al.*, “Very high specific activity erbium <sup>169</sup>Er production for potential receptor-targeted therapy”. *Nucl. Instrum. Methods B* vol. 463, pp. 468-471, 2020.
- [26] C. Vermeulen *et al.*, “Cross sections of proton-induced reactions on <sup>nat</sup>Gd with special emphasis on the production possibilities of <sup>152</sup>Tb and <sup>155</sup>Tb”, *Nucl. Instrum. Methods B* vol. 275, pp. 24-32, 2012.
- [27] V. M. Gadelshin *et al.*, “MELISSA: Laser Ion Source setup at CERN-MEDICIS facility”, *Nucl. Instrum. Methods* vol. 463, pp. 460-463, 2020.
- [28] V. M. Gadelshin, S. Wilkins and the MEDICIS collaboration, “First laser ions at the CERN-MEDICIS facility”, *Hyperfine Interactions*, vol. 241, no. 1, article no. 55, 2020.