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Published in:
Book of Abstracts, Sustain 2017

Publication date:
2017

Document Version
Publisher’s PDF, also known as Version of record

Link back to DTU Orbit

Citation (APA):
Photovoltaic subretinal implants for blind patients

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Background
Retinal diseases are the most frequent causes of visual loss in the Western world. Two of the prominent diseases are age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and retinitis pigmentosa (RP). The pathophysiology of AMD and RP is unknown, but a central event leading to visual loss in these diseases is the degeneration of retinal photoreceptors. At present, there are no effective treatments of photoreceptor degeneration. A promising potential solution for partial restoration of sight is to implant a solar cell that translates incoming light into an electrical signal to be transmitted to the secondary neurons in the retina [1-4]. We propose a 1-diode subretinal prosthesis design utilizing 3D electrodes made from pyrolytic carbon (Figure 1). The final device would rely on via holes between isolated electrodes (pixels) enabling sufficient nutrient flow to the cells and charge transport from each local electrode to a common return electrode on the rear of the device. A sketch of the device is shown in Figure 1 (right).

Fabrication of complete devices is currently ongoing and future work includes measuring potentials from porcine retinal tissue when the photovoltaic implant is placed in contact with tissue and illuminated with an appropriate light source in order to realize photovoltaic stimulation of neurons.

Acknowledgements
The authors gratefully acknowledge the funding support from Velux Fonden (project nr. 13891) and Young Investigator Program of the Villum Foundation, project no. VKR023438.

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