swiss
clinical
trial
organisation

SCTO

The Swiss Clinical Trial Unit Network
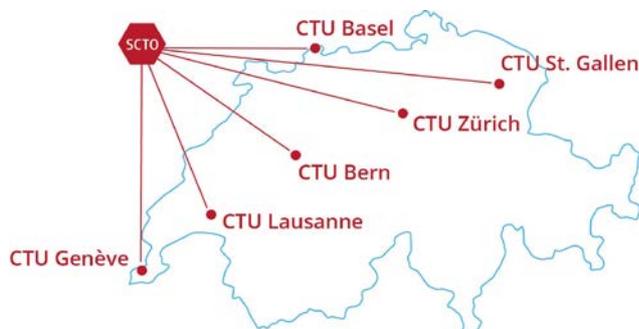
Background

Across the globe, a drive is underway to improve the framework for academic clinical research, to enhance its quality and outcomes, and to optimise the performance of its multicentre trials. In Switzerland, the Swiss Federation is engaged in several ways. These include: establishing a master plan to promote biomedical research and technology; identifying the most urgent issues and potential measures; revising the Federal Act on the Promotion of Research and Innovation (RIPA); and this, in the context of Swiss voters having accepted the Swiss Human Research Act. Overall, this revised framework promises a bright future for clinical research in the country. The Clinical Trial Unit (CTU) network is part of this forward-looking solution and **plays a key role in facilitating academic clinical research** – locally, nationally, and internationally.

Who makes up the CTU network?

The CTU network is an important national infrastructure, established to facilitate clinical research in Switzerland. With a countrywide influence, it is made up of **six local CTUs, situated in Basel, Berne, Geneva, Lausanne, St Gallen and Zurich**.

Each of these six centres for clinical research is closely linked to the medical faculties of a Swiss university, either as part of a local university hospital or linked to the university. The largest Swiss cantonal hospital, St Gallen (KSSG), is also a member of the CTU network and works with other Swiss universities on particular projects.

Combining forces, the CTU network not only forms a well-established and nationally coordinated structure. Most notably, it also serves as the **largest provider of services and education in academic clinical research in Switzerland**. Altogether, more than 140 people work within this network.

Who coordinates the CTU network?

The CTU network is coordinated by the Swiss Clinical Trial Organisation (SCTO). As an umbrella organisation, **the SCTO enhances cooperation among these centres**.

By promoting a nationally harmonised culture of high-quality clinical research, the SCTO positions its members as the primary access point for (academic) clinical research in Switzerland, but with both national and international relevance.

What services does the network provide?

The CTU network offers comprehensive services and support **through all phases of a clinical study**: right from the idea and its conception, through planning, setup, and implementation to its conclusion. Support includes: consultancy, methodological support, statistics, regulatory support, data management, on-site management, and monitoring.

In 2015, the CTU network supported **more than 350 clinical studies (ClinO)** during at least one of the abovementioned study phases. Consultancies for interested investigators total **more than 2000 study projects and ideas**.

How are young scientists nurtured?

In the spirit of encouraging science-based innovation, the CTU network is training up talented young scientists, offering them a broad selection of courses and qualifications.

As the **largest training provider in clinical research in the country**, the network offers courses catering to a wide range of levels and needs. They run from basic, to mandatory Good Clinical Practice (GCP) trainings, through to postgraduate education.

Training and Education (in 2015)

Number of participants trained	> 3300
Ethics & Good Clinical Practice (GCP) investigator	59%
Ethics & GCP, sponsor-investigator	24%
Undergraduate, e.g. MD, MSc	13%
Postgraduate, e.g. CAS, DAS, MSc/MAS	3%

Which (inter)national collaborations does the network enjoy?

The CTU network collaborates with several institutions, networks, and groups, including:

SCTO working groups: Specialists and researchers from the CTU network take part in three permanent SCTO working groups (Quality Assurance, Education, and Data Management), to develop common tools and unified standards.

European Clinical Research Infrastructure Network (ECRIN): Subsequent to an agreement between the SCTO and ECRIN, the SCTO serves as the local ECRIN liaison point, providing services to multinational and multicentre trials.

SwissPedNet and **PedCRIN** (the Swiss and pan-European paediatric networks, respectively): Although dedicated purely to children, paediatric hubs are still closely and locally linked to CTUs. They share the non-paediatric-specific aspects of their clinical research with corresponding facilities for adults. Several such exchanges exist already. Other proposed infrastructure, organisations and projects are ready for cooperation.

Other **private and public partners**: Via its umbrella organisation, SCTO, the CTU network enjoys numerous fruitful partnerships, such as with the Swiss Group for Clinical Cancer Research (SAKK).

What other benefits does collaborating with the CTU network bring?

By collaborating with the CTU network, you and your organisation can achieve:

Regulatory requirements: The CTU network supports clinical research in Switzerland, whether locally or foreign sponsored. This helps you fulfil local legal, regulatory, and ethical requirements.

Smoother and wider access to expertise and facilities: This means that different CTUs can pool resources and offer the trials a greater scope and potential impact. Accordingly, projects undergoing application and authorisation processes will be more scientifically, ethically, medically, and methodologically sound.

Easier access to trial participants: Multicentre trials make it easier to access to larger numbers of trial participants and to recruit them more quickly. This is particularly important for rare diseases and medical devices.

Support with data management: The CTU network has defined baseline standards for sharing data management (according to the SCTO-published **Guidelines for Good Operational Practice**) and for using the same data management system, secuTrial®. Such streamlining means that CTUs enjoy mutual support, exchange their expertise, and benefit from simplified data collection and trial management.

Networking: By meeting and getting to know other professionals and experts, members liaise with key (inter)national stakeholders in clinical research.

What does the future hold?

The CTU network will provide ongoing optimal clinical research infrastructure and quality structures for all disease areas. In order to continuously improve, the network will strengthen its collaboration and build platforms for specific services. This means that responsibilities will be shared among the network members.

The decentralised services provided by the network have proven to offer clinical researchers excellent support. Looking forward, it will be advisable to avoid having parallel infrastructures, but rather to reinforce a smooth, efficient, and enduring exchange of expertise and harmonisation efforts, at the national level. To realise these goals, the CTU network will define and create **platforms of shared skills**. These platforms will facilitate (inter)national clinical research in a sustainable way, serving all kinds of sponsors and clients.

How can you become involved?

You are invited to contact the SCTO or one of the CTUs to explore how you can collaborate with the CTU network. Let's work together, to make scientific clinical research in Switzerland ever stronger.

Contacts and information

MEMBER OF THE CTU NETWORK