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**Title of presentation:** Developments and efforts for international cooperation and standardization in the area of Forest Medicine/Forest Therapy

**Abstract:** Since the late 1980s, Japan has moved ahead with considerable investments into research and development of Forest Therapy, locally known as Shinrin-yoku ( 森林浴) or Shinrin-ryōhō (森林療法). During the last two decades, these efforts were taken up and expanded significantly in South Korea where Forest Therapy is known as *Sanlimyok* (산림욕). Hundreds of research publications underscored the medical, physiological, therapeutic as well as socio-economic benefits for Public health in those countries. In Asia, Taiwan and China have since begun to adopt these efforts realizing the need for finding alternatives to limit rising national health bills.

In Europe, several countries have long realized the health benefits of nature and forests. However, research into Forest Therapy or Forest Medicine has been rather scant. While some research projects had been initiated in Scandinavia, only a handful of noteworthy publications resulted. Recent meta-reviews underscored the need to intensify and expand research. Interestingly, public attention on the goodness of forests and on benefitting from sensory, physical and therapeutic exercises and tasks has been raised rapidly by TV documentaries, books and articles in dozens of newspapers, magazines and tabloids across Germany and Austria, last but not the least stimulated by prominent authors and celebrities like Peter Wohlleben, Clemens Arvey, Judy Dench or David Attenborough.

While the impact of recent research findings has led to some 'mushrooming' of individuals, groups or resorts offering 'forest bathing' or 'forest therapy' in a range of countries, it has become timely and relevant to streamline research, training and Public awareness nationally, but more so, internationally.



Realizing this shortcoming, the Australian Nature and Forest Therapy Alliance (ANFTA) was set up in Melbourne to complement the noteworthy efforts and accomplishments undertaken in Asia with the recent steps beginning to take root in Europe with regards to Forest Therapy and Forest Medicine. Whereas South Korea, meanwhile, reaps in excess of USD 2 billion per annum through Forest Therapy alone and while Japan has established more than 60 Forest Base Camps nationally, there is not a single dedicated Chair of Forest Therapy resp. Forest Medicine at either university in Germany, Switzerland, Austria or Scandinavia. Not in any of the EU countries.

Thus, if we wish to professionalize efforts and advance research, standardize training and raise recognition and awareness of Forest Medicine/Forest Therapy as an evidence-based, cost-effective Public health approach, concerted steps at both national and international levels need to be taken. This congress offers a vital platform in this respect.