PRESS RELEASE

++ Please publish on 15th May 2025 from 8.00 a.m. CET ++

Jung Foundation honours pioneering research approaches for new cancer therapies, neurodegenerative diseases and infections

Prof. Elena Conti, PhD (Munich) and Prof. Dr Jörn Piel (Zurich) receive long-established Jung Prize for Medicine, Dr med. Benjamin Ruf, MD (Tübingen) honoured with Jung Career Advancement Award, Prof. Wolf-Herman Fridman, MD, PhD, (Paris) awarded Jung Gold Medal for Medicine

Hamburg, 15th May 2025: Which researchers are making decisive advances in medicine? Today, the Hamburg ***Jung Foundation for Science and Research*** *honours ground-breaking discoveries that open up new avenues in the treatment of serious diseases. The Hamburg-based, independent foundation has been awarding the prestigious and highly endowed* ***Jung***

Prize for Medicine *since 1976. This year, the foundation is honouring* ***Prof. Elena Conti****, PhD, Director at the Max Planck Institute of Biochemistry in Martinsried near* ***Munich****, and* ***Prof. Dr Jörn Piel****, microbiologist and head of the Bacterial Natural Products research group at the Institute of Microbiology at ETH* ***Zurich****. The* ***Jung Career Advancement Award*** *goes to* ***Dr med. Benjamin Ruf****, physician and researcher at the Faculty of Medicine and the Department of Internal Medicine I in Tübingen. With the* ***Jung Gold Medal for Medicine****, the Jung Foundation honours the scientific life's work of* ***Prof. Wolf-Herman Fridman, MD, PhD****, Professor Emeritus of Immunology at the Cordeliers Research Centre of the Université* ***Paris*** *Cité. The award ceremony will take place in the evening at the Hanse Lounge in Hamburg in the intimate setting of the Jung family. With its annual awards, the Jung Foundation honours outstanding scientific achievements that have the potential to change diagnostics and therapy in the long term or have already done so. With the awards and scholarships totalling up to 650,000 euros per year, it promotes excellent science and advances medical innovations that can be decisive for patients worldwide.*

Prof Elena Conti (Munich) – Precise control of the cell's messages

Prof. Elena Conti, PhD (58), Director at the Max Planck Institute of Biochemistry in Martinsried near Munich, researches how cells recognise and degrade defective messenger RNAs (mRNAs). She is particularly interested in disease-relevant mutations in these mechanisms, which she is decoding using the latest methods. Disorders in this process can lead to neurodegenerative diseases such as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) and spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), certain types of cancer and genetic metabolic disorders. Her work in this field has made a decisive contribution to understanding the interplay of molecular machines. For this research, she is receiving this year's Jung Prize for Science and Research, which she shares with Prof. Dr Jörn Piel. She intends to use her share of the prize

money to pursue a new, promising hypothesis on a specific mutation in the exosome complex that plays a key role in RNA degradation.

For Conti, science is a passion that she discovered over the years – inspired by excellent teachers and mentors. ‘For me, research is like a big jigsaw puzzle. You collect individual observations, put them together and suddenly a picture emerges,’ she says, describing her fascination. Away from science, she finds balance in nature or playing tennis, ‘even if my daughter always wins,’ she says with a laugh.

Prof. Dr Jörn Piel (Zurich) – Unlocking nature’s hidden pharmacy

Prof. Dr Jörn Piel (58), microbiologist and head of the Bacterial Natural Products research group at the Institute of Microbiology at ETH Zurich, is researching the enormous diversity of bacteria that have not yet been cultivated in the laboratory – and therefore represent an untapped source of potential active substances. Many of these microorganisms produce bioactive substances that could be promising for new cancer drugs, antibiotics and antiviral therapies. However, these substances are often only available in minute quantities in nature. Piel's research aims to replicate their genes in laboratory models to enable sustainable production.

Piel discovered his fascination for chemistry at an early age – triggered by an adventurous family story about failed rocket experiments in the living room. ‘I'm motivated by the spirit of discovery,’ he says. ‘It's like discovering completely new forms of life – with the potential to revolutionise medicine.’ With his share of the prize money from the Jung Prize for Medicine, which he is receiving this year from the Jung Foundation together with Prof. Elena Conti, PhD, he wants to advance the development of innovative biotechnological methods to harness these hidden natural substances. In his private life, he is enthusiastic about the cuisine of foreign cultures – a passion that he combines with his research with a wink: ‘Here, too, the result is not always predictable – but often a real discovery.’

Dr med. Benjamin Ruf (Tübingen) – The immune system as the key to fighting cancer

Dr med. Benjamin Ruf (34), research group leader at the M3 Research Center for Malignoma, Metabolome and Microbiome at the Faculty of Medicine in Tübingen, is dedicated to personalised cancer therapy. His focus is on the question of how the body's own immune system can be used specifically against tumours. This is because tumour cells develop sophisticated mechanisms to hide from the immune system – Ruf's research aims to break through these barriers and develop new immune-based treatment strategies for difficult-to-treat cancers. As a doctor in training at the Department of Internal Medicine I in Tübingen, Ruf experiences every day how urgently new therapies are needed. 'Our treatment options are often not optimal. Research gives me hope that one day we will find new approaches that will noticeably improve the lives of cancer patients,' he explains. His approach combines genetic analyses with a precise examination of the interaction between the tumour and the immune system in order to enable tailored treatment options. Furthermore, Dr Ruf is part of the only oncology Cluster of Excellence in Germany, the "iFIT" (Image Guided & Functionally Instructed Tumor Therapies"), located at the Medical Faculty in Tübingen. He hopes to use the 210,000 euro Young Career Award to further develop this innovative concept. In his free time, he seeks balance in exercise – be it cycling, running or in the gym. 'Research is also a long-distance run – but with every step we get closer to the goal,' he says with a smile.

Prof. Wolf-Herman Fridman (Paris) – Pioneer of immuno-oncology

Prof. Wolf-Herman Fridman (79), MD, PhD, is one of the pioneers of immuno-oncology – the field of research that uses the body's own immune system to fight cancer. Now Professor Emeritus of Immunology at the Cordeliers Research Centre of the Université Paris Cité, he discovered back in the 1960s that the immune system of leukaemia patients can recognise

their own tumour cells – a ground-breaking discovery that laid the foundation for modern cancer therapies. His research showed that the immune response is decisively controlled in the tumour microenvironment, i.e. directly in the tumour environment. This approach led to the development of immunotherapies, which today enable a complete cure for various types of cancer.

‘When I started, cancer was considered incurable – today, we can fight it with the immune system,’ says Fridman, describing the revolution in his field. His findings contributed to the establishment of targeted antibody therapies that activate the immune system in oncology worldwide. He is being honoured for his life's work with the Jung Gold Medal for Medicine. With the associated scholarship, he would like to support a young scientist who will continue along this research path. In addition to science, he is passionate about art, music and literature – and enjoys losing himself in foreign cities. ‘Curiosity drives me – be it in my research or on my travels.’

Invitation to the 5th Jung Symposium

Anyone wishing to delve deeper into the research findings of this year's award winners will have the opportunity to do so on 16th May 2025. At the 5th Jung Symposium ‘Excellence in Human Medicine 2025’, Prof. Elena Conti, Prof. Dr Jörn Piel, Prof. Wolf-Herman Fridman and Dr med. Benjamin Ruf will present their work in exciting talks. The event will take place from 13:00 to 16:00 in the Ian K. Karan Lecture Hall, Campus Lehre (Building N55) of the University Medical Centre Hamburg-Eppendorf (UKE) and will also be broadcast via livestream.

All information, the current programme and the opportunity to register are available at https://jung-stiftung.de/en/symposium-2025/. Participation is free of charge, registration is requested.

May 2025

Caption: (from left to right). Benjamin Ruf, MD (Tübingen) awarded the Jung Career Advancement Award 2025; Prof. Dr Jörn Piel (Zurich) and Prof. Elena Conti, PhD (Munich) - they jointly receive the Jung Prize for Medicine 2025; Prof. Wolf-Herman Fridman, MD, PhD, (Paris) is awarded the Jung Gold Medal for Medicine 2025 by the Jung Foundation.

About the Jung Foundation for Science and Research

The Jung Foundation for Science and Research, based in Hamburg, Germany, is an independent organization that annually provides up to three awards in recognition of fundamental and advanced research projects of significant clinical relevance. Since 1967, the foundation has invested more than 15 million euros in supporting researchers whose projects build a bridge between research and the bedside. Under the motto of 'Excellence in human medicine', the foundation makes a significant contribution to the development of new treatment methods. The Jung Prize for Medicine, the Jung Gold Medal for Medicine and the Jung Career Advancement Award for Medical Research are among the most highly endowed medical prizes in Europe. With the additional awarding of fellowships and German scholarships, the foundation provides a total funding of up to 650,000 euros annually.

Further information at www.jung-stiftung.de/

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