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### Pressemitteilung

### Berlin Institute of Health in der Charité (BIH)

#### Dr. Stefanie Seltmann

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Wissenschaftliche Tagungen Biologie, Medizin überregional



## The aftershock of the COVID-19 pandemic and genomic data for global human health:

The BIH hosts panel discussions at the World Health Summit. Although all the world has been focusing on vaccinations, infection rates and ICU occupancy levels, BIH scientists believe the real big wave is still coming: Long COVID. The patients who successfully survived COVID-19 but are still suffering from long-term effects will in all likelihood continue to present a challenge to the healthcare system for a long time to come. And it is not only COVID-19 that has laid bare the unequal global distribution of modern medicine: Genomics has significantly improved patient care in wealthy nations, especially when it comes to treating rare diseases or cancer.

Yet in many lower-income countries such advances are still a long way off. At this year's World Health Summit, scientists from the Berlin Institute of Health at Charité (BIH) are hosting two panel discussions featuring leading international experts. Both panels will take place on Monday, October 25, and will address respectively what the impending wave of Long COVID will mean for public health and how to use genomic research discoveries to improve the health of all people.

"The biggest wave is still to come," Prof. Georg Duda, BIH Chair for Engineering Regenerative Therapies, is convinced. Many of those who have recovered continue to suffer the effects of COVID-19 for weeks and months. These include breathing difficulties, concentration problems, headaches, fatigue, cardiovascular and digestive problems, and even hair loss and skin rashes. The effects are varied and are different from patient to patient. "So we need to think about how we can tackle these multilayered problems with innovative approaches," explains Duda.

Duda has put together an international and interdisciplinary lineup of speakers for the panel discussion: Prof. Carmen Scheibenbogen of the Institute of Medical Immunology at Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin is studying the different aspects of Long COVID, while Prof. Ross Zafonte of Harvard Medical School in Boston is looking at how to comprehensively diagnose Long COVID patients. Prof. Yehuda Shoenfeld of Tel Aviv University in Israel is targeting the autoantibodies in the blood of Long COVID patients as a way to help sufferers. Prof. Nina Babel of the BIH Center for Regenerative Therapies (BCRT) is pursuing the same goal by investigating the cellular immune response of Long COVID patients as a therapeutic avenue.

The panel discussion "Long COVID: The Aftershock of the Pandemic" is being held on Monday, October 25, 2021, from 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. You can view the panel free of charge via the following link:

Digital Session: https://worldhealthsummit.zoom.us/j/85400777756 Meeting ID: 854 0077 7756

"Genomic research and sequencing have been the driver for major improvements in the diagnosis and treatment of rare diseases and cancer," says Prof. Claudia Langenberg, who heads the Computational Medicine Group at the BIH.

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"Modern genomic medicine is already an integral part of routine healthcare in wealthy nations, but this is far from the case in low- and middle- income countries." Langenberg sees challenges due to a focus on health problems of the Global North and concerning the generalizability of research findings from studies predominantly conducted in European-descent patients and populations. As a result, the discoveries made by these studies usually only benefit "a privileged few." "Initiatives such as H3Africa have shown the benefit of studying genetically diverse populations for African and global health," notes Langenberg. "We should keep that in mind for future studies."

Langenberg is bringing together the international stars of genomics research for the panel discussion: Prof. Ewan Birney is Director of the European Bionformatics Institute of the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) in the UK and Deputy Director General of EMBL. Prof. Bartha Knoppers is a lawyer and expert on the ethical aspects of genetics, genomics and biotechnology at McGill University in Canada. Prof. Sharon Peacock is a Professor of Public Health and Microbiology at the University of Cambridge and Executive Director and Chair of the COVID-19 Genomics UK (COG-UK) consortium. Dr. Charles Rotimi is Director of the Center for Research in Genomics and Global Health at the Trans-National Institutes of Health (NIH) of the USA and has just been selected as the next Scientific Director of the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI). Dr. Soumya Swaminathan is the Chief Scientist at the World Health Organization (WHO).

The panel discussion "How Genomics and Global Genomic Data Sharing Can Benefit Human Health" is being held on Monday, October 25, 2021, from 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. You can view the panel free of charge via the following link:

Digital Session: https://worldhealthsummit.zoom.us/j/83687594010 Meeting ID: 836 8759 4010

About the Berlin Institute of Health (BIH) at Charité

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The mission of the Berlin Institute of Health (BIH) is medical translation: transferring biomedical research findings into novel approaches to personalized prediction, prevention, diagnostics and therapies and, conversely, using clinical observations to develop new research ideas. The aim is to deliver relevant medical benefits to patients and the population at large. As the translational research unit within Charité, the BIH is also committed to establishing a comprehensive translational ecosystem – one that places emphasis on a system-wide understanding of health and disease and that promotes change in the biomedical translational research culture. The BIH was founded in 2013 and is funded 90 percent by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and 10 percent by the State of Berlin. The founding institutions, Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin and Max Delbrück Center for Molecular Medicine in the Helmholtz Association (MDC), were independent, member entities within the BIH until 2020. Since 2021 the BIH has been integrated into Charité as the so-called third pillar. The MDC is now the Privileged Partner of the BIH.

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