

Pressemitteilung

Leibniz-Institut für Immuntherapie

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20.06.2023

<http://idw-online.de/de/news816414>

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Förderstiftung MHH plus awards Johann-Georg-Zimmermann Medal to LIT scientist Prof. Dr. Hinrich Abken

Regensburg, 20 June 2023 - The prestigious Johann-Georg-Zimmermann Medal was awarded this year to LIT scientist Prof. Dr. Hinrich Abken in recognition of his lifetime achievements.

The Johann-Georg-Zimmermann Medal is one of the highest awards for merit in cancer research in Germany and is awarded by the Förderstiftung MHH plus. With Hinrich Abken, Director at the Leibniz Institute for Immunotherapy in Regensburg, the medal goes to a pioneer of CAR-T cell therapy, an immunotherapy that can now be a last therapy option for leukemias and lymphomas. The President of the Hanover Medical School, Prof. Dr. Michael Manns, presented the award together with the Deputy Chairman of the Förderstiftung MHH plus, Prof. Dr. Siegfried Piepenbrock, and in the presence of Lower Saxony's Science Minister Falko Mohrs. "With Prof. Dr. Hinrich Abken, we are honouring an internationally renowned cancer researcher who has made significant contributions to the immunotherapy of tumours," emphasised MHH President Prof. Dr. Michael Manns.

Prof. Dr. Siegfried Piepenbrock, deputy chairman of the MHH plus Förderstiftung: "External financiers from business and industry have increasingly withdrawn from funding science prizes in the recent past. However, prizes still play a very special role in the external presentation of science and the personal honouring and recognition of outstanding achievements. Thus, the Förderstiftung MHH plus is happy and proud to finance the Johann-Georg-Zimmermann Medal and Prize and to be able to award them together with the MHH. With Prof. Hinrich Abken, pioneer of CAR-T cell therapy, an outstanding cancer researcher is being honoured."

Prof. Dr. Philipp Beckhove, Scientific Director of the LIT - Leibniz Institute for Immunotherapy comments: LIT congratulates Hinrich Abken on this outstanding recognition of his scientific and translational achievements in the field of synthetic immunology. He has succeeded in developing diverse, innovative gene therapy concepts and tools. With these, immune cells can be equipped with entirely new functions and reprogrammed into "living drug factories". These concepts have proven to be robust and clinically feasible and form an important basis for the development of new immunotherapies against previously incurable diseases at LIT and worldwide."

Hinrich Abken studied medicine in Essen, where he became involved in experimental cancer research during his studies. After a doctorate and post-doctoral period in molecular and cell biology at the West German Tumour Centre (with Prof. M. F. Rajewsky), he moved to the Institute of Genetics at the Faculty of Natural Sciences of the University of Bonn (with Prof. K. Willecke) as a research group leader in 1987, where he habilitated in the subjects of genetics and immunology in 1993. In the same year, he was appointed Professor of Tumour Genetics at the Clinic I for Internal Medicine (Prof. M. Hallek) at the Medical Faculty of the University of Cologne, where he turned his attention to researching the immune response against tumours. Since 2018, he has headed the Department of Gene Immunotherapy at the LIT - Leibniz Institute for Immunotherapy and holds the Chair of Gene Immunotherapy at the University of Regensburg.

"We were fascinated by the idea of whether the immune response of T cells could be specifically directed against tumours," says Professor Abken. As early as 1994, his research group developed recombinant recognition molecules, now known as "chimeric antigen receptors" (CARs). Through innovative application of the tools of synthetic immunology, the initial vision of an immune cell-driven response against tumours led to the development of several generations of CARs, some of which are now successfully used in the clinic worldwide. In 30 years of pioneering, visionary research and development in synthetic immunology, he succeeded in moulding the initial idea of a directed T-cell response into a solid concept of "CAR engineering", which has been taken up by many groups at home and abroad and is constantly being further developed.

Congratulations were also received from the President of the University of Regensburg, Prof. Dr. Udo Hebel: "Congratulations to Prof. Abken for this high award and thus also for the excellent work in the field of immunology at the Regensburg site."

In 2022, the LIT - Leibniz Institute for Immunotherapy emerged as a non-university institute of the Leibniz Association from a central institution of the University of Regensburg, the RCI - Regensburg Center for Interventional Immunology as an organizational umbrella for the bundling and networking of immunological research of the University and the University Hospital and serves to develop and study therapies against cancer, immune defects and rejection reactions after organ and stem cell transplantation.

URL zur Pressemitteilung: <https://www.rcii.de/>

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Prof. Dr. Peter Hillemanns, Prof. Dr. Michael Manns, Dr. Mark Schmitt, Prof. Dr. Hinrich Abken, Falko Mohrs, Prof. Dr. Siegfried Piepenbrock
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Prof. Dr. Hinrich Abken

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