

New Impulses for Cancer Prevention

Cornelia Ulrich heads the Department of Preventive Oncology at the National Center for Tumor Diseases.

Since mid-September, Professor Cornelia Ulrich has been director of the Department of Preventive Oncology at the National Center for Tumor Diseases (NCT) in Heidelberg. Together with Professor Christof von Kalle, director of the Department of Translational Oncology and coordinator of the board of directors, and Professor Dirk Jäger, director of the Department of Medical Oncology, Cornelia Ulrich is the third director at NCT. At the same time, she is head of the newly established Preventive Oncology Division at the German Cancer Research Center (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum, DKFZ), where she holds a Helmholtz Excellence Professorship. The division studies the connection between genetic and environmental factors in carcinogenesis as well as cancer prevention and early diagnosis. A further focus is to establish innovative screening methods for early diagnosis of cancer. Cornelia Ulrich also aims to find out what cancer patients themselves can do to improve their prognosis and well-being.

Since 1999, Cornelia Ulrich worked at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, USA, where she had a professorship in the Cancer Prevention Program. Her main focus there was to study whether cancer is connected with a patient's genetic characteristics. She was particularly interested in genes that are associated with inflammations and metabolic processes. Ulrich intends to use the results for adjusting cancer prevention for each person individually.

In addition, Ulrich heads the ColoCare Study. The goal of this international consortium is, on the one hand, to improve the treatment of colorectal cancer patients by tailoring therapy to the individual patient. On the other hand, the goal of the study is to find out what patients can do for themselves to improve their prognosis and well-being after being diagnosed with colorectal cancer. Possibilities range from dietary changes over scientifically well-founded exercise programs through to prevention of metastasis with anti-inflammatory drugs. Ulrich is convinced that the Heidelberg location and NCT offer excellent possibilities to carry out interdisciplinary research projects which are based on a close interconnection of prevention and epidemiology with clinical practice. "With this new approach we can obtain findings which are useful for clinicians and directly beneficial for cancer patients," says Ulrich.

Cornelia Ulrich, aged 42, was born in Fellbach near Stuttgart and studied Nutritional Sciences at Hohenheim University until "Vordiplom". After that, she was awarded a Fulbright grant and went to Oregon State University in Corvallis, USA, where she wrote her master's thesis on the connection between nutrition, exercise and bone density in post-menopausal women. With a DAAD grant, Ulrich did her PhD thesis at the University of Washington in Seattle about the association between genes and nutrition to improve colorectal cancer prevention. Cornelia Ulrich is a mother of two sons aged six and nine years; her husband, Bruce Edgar, is also a professor in Heidelberg. It is a personal concern of her to encourage young women to take up a career in science: "It is not always easy if you try to balance family and work, but it's worth it and it's fun," that is her credo.

The National Center for Tumor Diseases (NCT) is a joint project of Heidelberg University Hospitals, the German Cancer Research Center (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum, DKFZ), Thorax Clinic Heidelberg and the German Cancer Aid (Deutsche Krebshilfe). NCT is

a new organizational form which combines optimum interdisciplinary patient care with excellent cancer research.

A picture for this press release is available at:
www.dkfz.de/de/presse/pressemitteilungen/2009/images/Ulrich.jpg

The German Cancer Research Center (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum, DKFZ) is the largest biomedical research institute in Germany and is a member of the Helmholtz Association of National Research Centers. More than 2,000 staff members, including 850 scientists, are investigating the mechanisms of cancer and are working to identify cancer risk factors. They provide the foundations for developing novel approaches in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of cancer. In addition, the staff of the Cancer Information Service (KID) offers information about the widespread disease of cancer for patients, their families, and the general public. The Center is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (90%) and the State of Baden-Württemberg (10%).

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