

May, 11 2012

## Opening Event of the Mildred Scheel Lectureship

**On May 11, 2012 was the opening day of the “Mildred Scheel Lectureship”, a series of lectures held by outstanding female cancer researchers, which takes place at the National Center for Tumor Diseases (NCT) Heidelberg. It commemorates the exceptional commitment of German Cancer Aid (Deutsche Krebshilfe) founder, Dr. Mildred Scheel, and aims to encourage especially young female scientists to take up a career in cancer research. In a captivating talk, Professor Lisa Coussens of the University of Oregon, U.S.A., gave an insight into the connections between immune system, inflammations and cancer. Among the guests at the opening celebration were Theresia Bauer, Minister of Science of the State of Baden-Württemberg; Fritz Pleitgen, President of German Cancer Aid; as well as the Chairmen of the Management Boards of the German Cancer Research Center (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum, DKFZ) and Heidelberg University Hospital. Federal Labor Minister Ursula von der Leyen sent an opening address for the lectureship.**

“Sixty percent of all human medicine students are women, but they only occupy 19 percent of professorships and even fewer of the highest ranking W3 professorships: only 10 percent,” stated Federal Labor Minister Ursula von der Leyen, who could not come to Heidelberg in person, in her opening address. “We educate these women in a long and costly process. Where have they all gone?” von der Leyen asked a baffled audience. Just to promptly answer the question herself, at least for part of the women: “The Swedish ambassador once told me how very pleased he was about all the German female doctors in Sweden’s hospitals.”

“In view of current demographic changes the representation of women in decision-making and high-ranking positions is of high importance for our country’s competitiveness,” said Baden-Württemberg’s Science Minister, Theresia Bauer, in her opening address. “I am therefore pleased that German Cancer Aid and the German Cancer Research Center have initiated this lecture series.” The minister admitted to the responsibility of politics and described the enhancement of opportunities for women at all levels of their scientific career as an important task.

“Mildred Scheel was the first wife of a German president who played a public role herself and became known all over the world for her charitable and social commitment,” said the President of German Cancer Aid, Fritz Pleitgen, in memory of its founder. “It was she who removed the taboo attached to cancer.” She launched educational campaigns, promoted cancer screening programs, and equipped hospitals and clinics with modern diagnostic and treatment instruments. In doing so, Scheel, who was a doctor and mother of three, accepted the challenge of reconciling work and family.

Professor Otmar Wiestler, Chairman of the Management Board of the German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ), directed everybody’s eyes to the larger-than-life bronze statue of Mildred Scheel in the entrance hall of the NCT building. “NCT as Germany’s first Comprehensive Cancer Center is committed to the aims of Mildred Scheel and German Cancer Aid – Helping, Researching, Informing. Both diagnosis and treatment of cancer patients are performed here at the highest level. At the same time, innovative methods are being explored and results are translated into the clinic as swiftly as possible.” Germany’s first Department of Preventive Oncology, headed by Professor Cornelia Ulrich, pursues research into new possibilities of preventing cancer.

Cornelia Ulrich was also the one who gave birth to the Mildred Scheel Lectureship. "I have always been fascinated by Mildred Scheel. I would have loved to meet her in person," says Ulrich.

"Without her, a tremendously important institution in the battle against cancer – German Cancer Aid – would be missing in Germany. Mildred Scheel also actively contributed to establishing the first Comprehensive Cancer Centers, one of which is the National Center for Tumor Diseases in Heidelberg."

"I am very happy that the German Cancer Research Center and German Cancer Aid have jointly agreed to make this lectureship in honor of Mildred Scheel possible by their financial support," said Ulrich.

Every year the organizers invite four outstanding female scientists in cancer research from Germany and abroad to give a talk at this lecture series. "This not only gives us an opportunity to hear many high-ranking women in science. Their role model also encourages young female scientists to start a career in science," Ulrich hopes. She is also the founder of the "Execute Women's Initiative" at DKFZ.

The opening lecture was held by Professor Lisa Coussens, Chair of the Department of Cell and Environmental Biology at the Knight Cancer Institute of Oregon University. Her internationally highly acknowledged research work focuses on the role of inflammations in cancer.

The German Cancer Research Center (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum, DKFZ) with its more than 2,500 employees is the largest biomedical research institute in Germany. At DKFZ, more than 1,000 scientists investigate how cancer develops, identify cancer risk factors and endeavor to find new strategies to prevent people from getting cancer. They develop novel approaches to make tumor diagnosis more precise and treatment of cancer patients more successful. Jointly with Heidelberg University Hospital, DKFZ has established the National Center for Tumor Diseases (NCT) Heidelberg where promising approaches from cancer research are translated into the clinic. 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 a member of the Helmholtz Association of National Research Centers. Ninety percent of its funding comes from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the remaining ten percent from the State of Baden-Württemberg.

Dr. Stefanie Seltmann  
Head of Press and Public Relations  
German Cancer Research Center  
Im Neuenheimer Feld 280  
D-69120 Heidelberg  
T: +49 6221 42 2854  
F: +49 6221 42 2968  
presse@dkfz.de