

Meyenburg Award 2009 for the First Targeted Anti-Cancer Drug

The 2009 Meyenburg Award for Cancer Research with an award sum of 50,000 euros goes to American blood cancer expert, Brian Druker. The Meyenburg Foundation honors Druker as a pioneer of molecularly targeted cancer therapies for developing the leukemia drug Imatinib (Gleevec). Druker's work has turned chronic myeloid leukemia from a deathly threat into a treatable disease for many patients today. The Meyenburg-Award will be presented on Wednesday, October 14, 2009 in the framework of a symposium at the German Cancer Research Center (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum, DKFZ).

Chronic myeloid leukemia (CML), a blood cancer affecting mainly adults, is one of the rare cases where the molecular cause of cancer is well understood. A specific shift in the hereditary material of white blood cells results in an enzyme with abnormal properties, bcr-abl tyrosine kinase. Due to this alteration, the kinase is permanently active and, thus, boosts the dividing activity of affected cells. Leukemia specialist Brian Druker recognized this enzyme defect as an Achilles' heel of the cancer cells. He developed the substance Imatinib, which specifically blocks bcr-abl tyrosine kinase and, thus, turns off the motor of uncontrolled cell division. In 1998, Druker carried out the first clinical trials of the new substance for treating CML. The results were so convincing that the drug was approved only three and a half years later.

Druker's work was groundbreaking for what have become known as targeted anticancer therapies. These are drugs which are directed against key molecules of tumor cells. By now, several such substances have been adopted as standard therapies of various cancers. Since the therapies are directed against targets that are found primarily in cancer cells, the new drugs have comparatively few side effects. In honor of this groundbreaking development, the Meyenburg Foundation awards its Cancer Research Award 2009 to Brian Druker.

Brian Druker, born in 1955, is director of the Knight Cancer Institute of Oregon Health & Science University in Portland, USA. After studying medicine at the University of California in San Diego, he continued his scientific career at the Dana Faber Cancer Institute and Harvard Medical School, among others.

On the occasion of the award ceremony, the Meyenburg Foundation will hold a scientific symposium on chronic myeloid leukemia at the German Cancer Research Center (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum, DKFZ) in Heidelberg. To give impulses from a different perspective, Federal football league referee Dr. Markus Merk will lecture about his rules for decision-making.

Dr. Marion Meyenburg, daughter of founders Wilhelm and Maria Meyenburg, will present the award to Brian Druker at the end of the symposium. The Meyenburg Award, an annual award for outstanding achievements in cancer research established in 1981, is one of Germany's science prizes with the highest award sums. The Meyenburg jurors have shown a very good sense for nominating laureates before. This became obvious once again only a few days ago when Dr. Elizabeth Blackburn, Meyenburg laureate in 2006, was awarded this year's Nobel Prize for Medicine. A couple of years earlier, Stockholm had also joined the judgment of the Meyenburg jurors by awarding the 2006 Nobel Prize for Medicine to Meyenburg laureate Andrew Fire. Furthermore, the Meyenburg laureates of the years 2007 and 2009, Shinya

Yamanaka and Brian Druker, have been honored with this year's Lasker Award, which is regarded as the highest distinction in medicine in the United States.

Date: Wednesday, October 14, 2009, 1 p.m. to 5:45 p.m.

Communication Center (KOZ) of the German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ)

Journalists and interested members of the public are welcome to attend.

Program: www.dkfz.de/de/veranstaltungen/veranstaltung.php?id=3385

A picture of the award winner is available at:

http://www.dkfz.de/de/presse/pressemitteilungen/2009/images/Druker_Brian.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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