

Stefan Wiemann Is the New Spokesman of the National Genome Research Network

Associate Professor (PD) Dr. Stefan Wiemann of the German Cancer Research Center (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum, DKFZ) has been elected spokesman of the Project Committee of the National Genome Research Network. This funding program supports projects in medical genome research aimed at fighting relevant widespread diseases.

Since 1995, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) has supported genome research in Germany. It all began with the German Human Genome Project, which was subsequently continued in the National Genome Research Network (Nationales Genomforschungsnetz, NGFN). After completion of the first two funding periods, medical genome research currently receives funding of 125 million euros for an initial three-year period in a program called "NGFN Plus". Stefan Wiemann, provisional head of DKFZ's Molecular Genome Analysis Division, has now been elected spokesman of the network for the next two years. In this position he succeeds Professor Martin Hrabé de Angelis of the Helmholtz Center Munich.

What are the goals of NGFN-Plus? Stefan Wiemann explains: "We need to understand the molecular processes that cause a disease. Using advanced technology, we are building the basis for developing targeted drugs. Therefore, our NGFN projects reach far beyond pure gene analysis today and also comprise RNA, proteins and metabolic and signaling pathways – to conduct a possibly broad search for targets for new treatment methods. With highly specialized analysis methods, NGFN creates an added value that separately working laboratories are not able to achieve. This is the only way to compete with international top research and to forge new paths for application in medicine at the same time."

Stefan Wiemann, a molecular biologist, did his PhD at the German Cancer Research Center and then went to work at the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL), one of the leading centers of automated DNA sequencing also based in Heidelberg. In 1996, Professor Annemarie Poustka brought Wiemann back to DKFZ to create a library of all human genes in the framework of the German Human Genome Project. Jointly with colleagues from EMBL, Wiemann developed a high-throughput method for introducing genes back into cells where they are translated into proteins whose function is systematically analyzed by molecular biologists.

NGFN-Plus comprises 26 Integrated Genome Research Networks. These networks, which are involved in over 300 projects, are working towards a comprehensive molecular understanding of disease processes. Priority is given to research into cancer and neurodegenerative diseases as well as cardiovascular and infectious diseases. The scientific results are intended to contribute to developing new diagnosis and treatment methods for these economically relevant diseases. "Of course, for us at the German Cancer Research Center, the search for targeted drugs against malignant tumors has priority," Wiemann says, "but we also urgently need innovative therapies against widespread diseases such as Alzheimer's, diabetes and other afflictions that can only be treated insufficiently today."

A picture of Wiemann is available on the Internet at:

<http://www.dkfz.de/de/presse/pressemitteilungen/2009/images/Wiemann.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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