

Werner Franke Turns Seventy

World-renowned cell biologist Professor Dr. Werner W. Franke celebrates his 70th birthday on January 31, 2010. Franke has been studying the protein skeleton of cells at the German Cancer Research Center (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum, DKFZ) since 1973. His work has contributed to improving the diagnosis of many cancers. Werner Franke is known to the broad public chiefly for his untiring fight against doping in top-level sports.

Werner W. Franke, born in 1940 in Paderborn, Germany, studied in Heidelberg, did his PhD in biology, chemistry and physics and qualified as a university professor in cell biology at the University of Freiburg. In 1973, the University of Heidelberg appointed him as a professor at the Faculty of Biology. Since then, he has headed the Division of Cell and Tumor Biology at DKFZ.

In the field of proteins of the cytoskeleton – the protein scaffolding that provides the cell with shape and support – Franke ranges among the leading scientists worldwide. Moreover, he and his co-workers have studied the junctions between individual cells – the sites where the filaments of the cytoskeleton attach, thus linking cells together to form tissues.

The protein components of the cytoskeleton are the profile of each cell. They remain unchanged even in cancer cells and, thus, provide information about a tumor's original tissue and the origin of metastatic tumors which have settled at sites distant from the primary tumor. Werner Franke's work has made it possible to identify and classify tumor cells on the basis of the molecular characteristics of these proteins. Franke's department has produced numerous specific antibodies against the various cytoskeleton components which are today being used in cancer diagnostics around the world.

Werner Franke, author of more than 600 scientific publications, ranges among the most cited scientists in the world in the area of molecular biology. For his work he has been awarded numerous prizes including the Meyenburg Award, the German Cancer Award and the Ernst Jung Award. In 2008, Franke became "Helmholtz Professor" and since then has headed a working group in cell biology at DKFZ after reaching retirement age.

The broad public knows Franke as an uncompromising critic of doping and a relentless anti-doping activist who uncovers all attempts to hush up drug abuse in competitive sports. Together with his wife, Brigitte Berendonk, he has been fighting for decades against the criminal schemes of sports officials and sports medicine specialists. Franke and Berendonk jointly uncovered and documented the government doping practices of the former German Democratic Republic. Thus, they provided the basis for convicting many of those responsible, as the Federal Court of Justice explicitly confirmed in two verdicts of 2000. For this long-standing fight against doping in competitive sports Franke and Berendonk were awarded the Cross of Merit on ribbon of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany in 2004.

Werner Franke is a man of many talents. During his time as a university student he was also a track and field athlete and coach and he even made his mark as a professional satirist. He performed on stage and wrote texts for famous political cabarets and for TV. Not even his 70th birthday is an occasion for Werner Franke to think about retiring, neither as a scientist nor as an anti-doping activist. Professor Dr. Otmar D. Wiestler, Scientific Director of the

German Cancer Research Center, states: "We are proud to have a personality like Werner Franke continuing his work at DKFZ."

A picture of Werner Franke is available on the Internet at
<http://www.dkfz.de/de/presse/pressemitteilungen/2010/images/Franke.jpg>

Picture source: Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum

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%).

Dr. Stefanie Seltmann
Leiterin Presse- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit
Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum
Im Neuenheimer Feld 280
D-69120 Heidelberg
T: +49 6221 42 2854
F: +49 6221 42 2968
presse@dkfz.de