

International Research Award for Ingrid Grummt

The French National Institute of Health and Medical Research (Inserm) awards its prestigious “Prix International” to Ingrid Grummt this year. The scientist from the German Cancer Research Center (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum, DKFZ) is honored for her life’s work. Grummt studies the role of RNA molecules regulating gene expression.

Professor Dr. Ingrid Grummt explores cellular processes affecting the genetic material and determining which regions of DNA can be transcribed and which are silenced. In her research career, the cell biologist has concentrated on molecules known as non-coding RNAs. About 70 percent of our genetic material gets transcribed into RNA, but only about two percent of this RNA carries the code for building proteins. The remaining RNA molecules are called ‘non-coding’ and regulate a multitude of vital cellular processes including those determining which genes can be transcribed and when this happens.

When Ingrid Grummt first became interested in non-coding RNAs, their functions in the cell were completely unknown. Her work has contributed to unraveling the mystery of these RNA molecules and their numerous functions. Today it is known that aging processes or the fatal mechanisms involved in cancer and some inherited diseases are regulated by non-coding RNAs. The French National Institute of Health and Medical Research Inserm (Institut national de la santé et de la recherche médicale) honors the internationally renowned scientist for her life’s work with its “Prix International”.

“The control of gene activity by non-coding RNAs may prove to be an important control point that we might use one day for specifically interfering in cellular processes. I therefore see my research as a basis that can be used for developing novel drugs,” said Grummt explaining the relevance of her research field.

Ingrid Grummt started her scientific career in the former German Democratic Republic at the German Academy of Sciences in Berlin. In 1972, she escaped to West Germany, along with her husband and child. She worked as a scientist at the Max Planck Institute of Biochemistry in Munich and subsequently at the University of Würzburg. In 1990, Grummt came to Heidelberg and became the first female departmental head at the German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ). Since 2012, Ingrid Grummt has continued her research beyond retirement age leading a working group at DKFZ for another three years. This is made possible by a ‘Helmholtz professorship’, a special type of grant by the Helmholtz Association.

The cell biologist has been honored with numerous prestigious awards such as the 1990 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize and the 2010 Women in Science Award. In 2008, Ingrid Grummt was awarded an ERC Advanced Grant, a highly competitive research grant by the European Research Council (ERC).

The award was presented at a ceremony at the Collège de France in Paris on December 3, 2012. Besides the International Prize, Inserm also awarded four other prizes to French researchers at this ceremony: the Grand Prize, the Honour Prize, the Research Prize and the Innovation Prize. Marisol Touraine, France’s Minister of Social Affairs and Health, and Geneviève Fioraso, France’s Minister of Higher Education and Research, attended the award ceremony.

A picture of Ingrid Grummt is available at the Internet:

<http://www.dkfz.de/de/presse/pressemitteilungen/2012/images/63-Grummt-Ingrid.jpg>

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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.

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