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Professor Jürgen Becker has been appointed to the Westdeutsches Tumorzentrum in Essen

Professor Jürgen Becker will accept a professorship at the Westdeutsches Tumorzentrum in Essen as of September 1, 2014. It is the first of three professorships that the German Cancer Consortium (DKTK) is establishing at the University Hospital Essen (UK Essen).

Prof. Becker will be heading the Department of Translational Oncology with a focus on skin cancer research in association with the Clinic for Dermatology of UK Essen. The Dermatology Clinic is part of the Westdeutsches Tumorzentrum (WTZ) at UK Essen, a Center of Excellence in Oncology supported by German Cancer Aid (Deutsche Krebshilfe) and also one of the eight partner sites in the German Cancer Consortium (DKTK). In the consortium, the German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ) in Heidelberg joins forces with leading university hospitals with the aim of enhancing the translation of research from bench to bedside.

Jürgen Becker studied medicine in Hanover and subsequently qualified as a medical specialist in dermatology at Würzburg University Dermatology Hospital. He worked at The Scripps Research Institute (TSRI) in La Jolla, California, for four years and received his PhD in immunology from the Danish Cancer Society Research Center in Copenhagen. Since 2010, Becker has been working at the Medical University of Graz, Austria. Since his days as a medical student, Becker's scientific work has addressed topics in tumor biology and tumor immunology that are relevant to various types of skin cancer.

Becker's appointment is part of the DKTK consortium, a joint initiative of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), the participating German states, the German Cancer Aid and the DKFZ. "We are pleased that we have been able to recruit Prof. Becker to our faculty," says Prof. Martin Schuler of the Clinic for Internal Medicine (Tumor Research) of UK Essen and coordinator of the DKTK partner site Essen/Düsseldorf. "His appointment will enable us to further enhance our outstanding expertise in the field of skin cancer research," adds Prof. Dirk Schadendorf, director of the Clinic for Dermatology at UK Essen and director of WTZ. "This professorship enhances the possibilities for translational research of the Essen Dermatology Clinic, WTZ, DKTK and the DKFZ. I am looking forward to working in such a stimulating environment," says Jürgen Becker.

The focus of the DKTK is to develop interdisciplinary research approaches and innovative clinical trials. These should help enhance cancer prevention and diagnosis and more swiftly facilitate the application of personalized treatments for cancer patients. Besides Essen/Düsseldorf, the DKTK unites seven other partner sites: Berlin, Dresden, Frankfurt/Mainz, Freiburg, Heidelberg, Munich and Tübingen. The DKTK was founded based on a joint initiative by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), the German Cancer Aid and the DKFZ. By 2014 the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the participating states will provide annual funding of approximately €28 million for the consortium. The German Cancer Aid provides additional funding for specific research projects upon request after an evaluation.

In Germany, approximately 225,000 people are newly diagnosed with skin cancer each year; of these, more than 25,000 are affected by black skin cancer (melanoma), which is considered an aggressive type. About 3,500 people succumb each year to melanoma because their disease is detected at too late a stage. If detected and removed at an early stage, however, the chances of curing melanoma are very good. Melanoma was considered incurable up until a few years ago, but today one out of five patients can be cured thanks to so-called "individualized medicine." Research on new treatment methods is carried out with a major participation of scientists from the Essen Medical Faculty.

In the German Cancer Consortium (DKTK), the German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ) joins up with university hospitals all over Germany. Assembled around a core at the DKFZ in Heidelberg, the consortium unites twenty high-ranked institutes from seven partner sites: Berlin, Dresden, Essen/Dusseldorf, Frankfurt/Mainz, Freiburg, Munich and Tübingen, all specialized in research and treatment focused on oncological diseases. The DKTK was found to promote translational research, bringing together scientists, physicians and associates to work jointly toward the main goal of enhancing the translation of research from bench to bedside. New approaches in prevention, diagnostics and treatment will be applied to cancer in common translational centers at all partner sites. Patients will be recruited at all partner sites for innovative studies to be carried out by the consortium as a whole. All the data from this work will be collected in a universal system. The harmonization of techniques and methods used in laboratories will ensure identical standards for all researchers and physicians in the consortium. A joint infrastructure will make them available for communal research. With the school of oncology, the consortium is additionally dedicating itself to the education of new physicians and scientists. Talented young people will be trained in cancer medicine and translational cancer research in a common effort involving all members. The German Cancer Consortium is a joint initiative of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the participating German states, German Cancer Aid and the German Cancer Research Center. It is one of the six German Centers for Health Research (DZG).

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