



## Press Release

April 21, 2015

**Robert Koch Award 2015 goes to Ralf Bartenschlager and Charles Rice /  
Peter Piot receives Robert Koch Gold Medal**

### Laureates lay the foundation for dramatic advances in the treatment of hepatitis C

Piot honored for his co-discovery of the Ebola virus and the fight  
against HIV infection in Africa

Berlin – The Robert Koch Foundation is jointly awarding this year's 100,000 Euro Robert Koch Award to Professors Ralf Bartenschlager, Heidelberg, Germany and Charles M. Rice, New York, USA. The two molecular biologists are being honored for their groundbreaking work on hepatitis C virus (HCV), laying the foundation for drug discovery efforts to combat this prevalent human liver disease.

Professor Peter Piot, London, UK, receives the Robert Koch Gold Medal for his lifetime achievements, in particular for his joint discovery of the Ebola virus and the establishment of preventative strategies to combat the spreading of HIV infection in Africa.

The award ceremony will take place on November 6, 2015 at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

The Robert Koch laureate Professor Ralf Bartenschlager is Executive Director of the Department of Molecular Virology at the University of Heidelberg, Germany. At the same time, Bartenschlager is head of the infection and cancer program at the German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ) in Heidelberg. The second laureate, Dr. Charles M. Rice, is Scientific and Executive Director of the interdisciplinary "Center for the Study of Hepatitis C" at The Rockefeller University, New York, USA. Both laureates are credited with helping to understand the HCV lifecycle, identifying promising antiviral targets, and establishing reproducible cell culture systems for basic studies that could also be used for drug screening and testing.

In chronic cases, HCV infection can result in liver cirrhosis and cancer. With new treatment options catalyzed by these basic discoveries, it is now possible to eliminate the virus permanently in the vast majority of patients treated. Worldwide, approximately 170 million people are infected with HCV, including an estimated 400,000 to 500,000 people in Germany.

#### **Gold Medal for worldwide Prevention of Infectious Diseases**

The fight against infectious diseases characterizes the life's work of Professor Peter Piot, Director of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, London, UK. In

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1976, Piot co-discovered the Ebola virus in Zaire. Furthermore, his numerous international activities led among others to understanding about the heterosexual spread of HIV and to the investigation and implementation of preventive strategies against AIDS in African countries. Piot has also been engaged in negotiating substantial price reductions for antiretroviral drugs, which has resulted in the establishment of HIV prevention programs in developing countries.

Photos of the laureates may be downloaded for editorial use at [www.robert-koch-stiftung.de/Laureates2015](http://www.robert-koch-stiftung.de/Laureates2015)

### **About the Robert Koch Foundation**

The Robert Koch Foundation is a non-profit foundation dedicated to the promotion of medical progress and is based in Berlin. It promotes basic scientific research in the field of infectious diseases, as well as exemplary projects that address medical and hygienic issues. Patron of the Foundation, which was founded in 1907, is German President Joachim Gauck.

The Foundation confers a number of distinguished scientific awards each year: the Robert Koch Award – one of Germany's most distinguished scientific awards, the Robert Koch Gold Medal, three awards for young scientists and, for the first time in 2013, the Hospital Hygiene and Infection Prevention Award.

Robert Koch (1843 – 1910), after whom the award is named, was the founder of modern-day bacteriology, for which he was awarded the 1905 Nobel Prize for Medicine and Physiology. From 1891 until his retirement in 1904, Koch was Head of the Institute for Infectious Diseases in Berlin.

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