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“You have to set yourself high goals”

by Jan Grabowski

Sandra Ciesek is now head of the Institute of Virology at Frankfurt University Hospital. Her career began at TWINCORE.

Her stay at TWINCORE was initially intended as an alternative to the typical post-doc period abroad. For many young doctors, such research stays are an option to enter into a Clinician Scientist career after their doctorate. However, this was no option for Sandra Ciesek for family reasons. So in 2008 she decided to do research in Thomas Pietschmann’s newly founded research team located at the equally new TWINCORE.

In the following three years, Ciesek investigated the role of immune suppressants on the replication of the hepatitis C virus (HCV). This research question was a perfect fit with the translational concept of TWINCORE. “Infection with HCV can damage the liver so severely that transplantation is the last resort for patients,” says Ciesek. “Afterwards, they need drugs to prevent rejection of the new organ.” She was able to optimally research whether and how these drugs influence the replication of HCV using the cell culture models in Pietschmann’s laboratory.

This laid the foundation both for her own research group, which she led at the MHH since 2011, and for her impressive career in the years that followed: Habilitation, residency in internal medicine and gastroenterology, and the birth of her daughter at the end of 2013. After a short

parental leave, she is working as a doctor in the Department of Gastroenterology at the MHH and in parallel leads her research group “Viral Hepatitis”.

With the call to a W2 professorship in virology at the Medical Faculty of the University of Duisburg-Essen in 2016, Ciesek commits herself to this field and completes a second residency in microbiology, virology and infectious disease epidemiology. She has now been director of the Institute of Medical Virology at Frankfurt University Hospital since 2019.

“You can’t limit yourself from the start, you have to set high goals for yourself,” she says. She advises young women in medicine and the natural sciences in particular not to slow themselves down or rule out certain career paths because they supposedly don’t fit in with later family planning. Because: “You can always go back afterwards.” It has also helped Ciesek a lot to change employers several times. “A new environment always broadens one’s horizons,” she says. “Some things you only learn to appreciate when you no longer have them.”

What she remembers most positively about TWINCORE are the good working conditions. “The labs were still new back then and we had a lot of space,” Ciesek recalls. She also praises the close links with the MHH and the HZI. “In this network, you always found the right cooperation partner quickly.”



Dear colleagues,

How do we find our way back to a productive presence culture of work? Certainly not by paying less for working from home, as US technology companies like Google are doing. The pandemic has fundamentally changed the world of work. Now we have to actively tackle the use of new opportunities. We want to continue to be flexible and mobile, but we still have to make sure that we work in the presence of colleagues where appropriate. For many projects, video or hybrid meetings can be sufficient. But we must not forget that often the best ideas come from direct personal discussion. We talk more focused and clearly face to face with “real” people than with video tiles. This is especially important for our younger colleagues, as it is the only way they can build stable networks for their future. For this reason, I am already looking forward to our 14th TWINCORE Symposium, which will take place locally on 15 September 2022, to get talking in person again!

I wish you a beautiful and preferably Corona-free summer!

Your Ulrich Kabi

“You have to build bridges!”

Prof. Georg Behrens, MD, is a senior physician at the Department of Rheumatology and Immunology at MHH and has headed the Board of Clinical Cooperation Partners at TWINCORE since the beginning of 2022. He spoke to CoreNews about previous projects and ideas for the future.



Prof. Behrens, what is the structure of the Board of Clinical Cooperation Partners?

What is your role as chairman?

The Board of Clinical Cooperation Partners consists of representatives of the clinical disciplines of the MHH. I see my role primarily as bringing people together and informing them about what opportunities exist.

My idea is that the MHH should always first consider whether there is someone at TWINCORE with whom one could work together when it comes to new collaborations. This way, with new projects or consortia, you can think beyond the MHH campus. This is simply obvious and our task is to initiate this exchange. Cooperation can only be fruitful if you know the experts from TWINCORE and their expertise.

But to think that this is easy just because

TWINCORE is right next door is not true. It is a big challenge. It is still true that many scientists are better informed about the work of their colleagues or even competitors from overseas than about what is being studied across the corridor. I want to keep drawing attention to this and also keep reorienting myself. But this is hard work and requires keeping the nose to the grindstone.

A lot is certainly possible, but you can't force things. Only with the right support things will happen. And in the end, we only work with people we find interesting and with whom we get along well.

What joint projects do you already have?

There are already a number of collaborations. I know many of the working groups at TWINCORE quite well. For example, we have provided samples for B-cell investigations for joint Covid projects with Ulrich Kalinke.

We are also working with Gerárd Krause on some Covid projects and Theresa Graalman from our clinic is setting up the junior research group “Translational Immunology” at TWINCORE.

But there is also a generation of new scientists who have come to TWINCORE. We should be interested in them at the MHH and we should actively contact them. One simply must not be shy. For the added value from a collaboration in research, an investment is needed first. The younger scientists who are still trying to make a career are sometimes hesitant. You have to build bridges for them. That is a constant task.

What are the concrete plans for the near future?

The Board will meet in autumn for the first time since I took over the position. A big challenge and task will initially be to take into account the changes in leadership positions here at the MHH in the coming months, especially in

internal medicine. And it will be important to introduce a certain systematic approach to the topics that are then discussed in the meetings.

What impulses can be expected then?

The Board is only an appeal level, an initial exchange. The board itself does not execute any work. The real work starts after the meetings. And that's where I see my task: to look at TWINCORE in a different way and present it, to look into some of the working groups and get to know the people. The techniques and expertise for scientific questions are becoming more and more complex. But TWINCORE is very well positioned in this respect. However, personal contacts are always crucial. Research doesn't work any other way.

Thank you very much for the interview, Prof. Behrens!

The interview was conducted by Jan Grabowski.

Death of Reinhold E. Schmidt

Member of the TWINCORE Supervisory Board passes away at the age of 70

Prof. Reinhold E. Schmidt, MD, passed away on 23 January 2022. The former head of the Department of Immunology and Rheumatology at MHH had been a member of the TWINCORE GmbH supervisory board since 2014. He facilitated new collaborations with clinical partners and supported the scientific education and

training of young clinical professionals at TWINCORE with great dedication.

He also represented his role as a bridge builder between the clinic and basic research as chairman of the Board of Clinical Cooperation partners of TWINCORE. Through his participation in the committees, he contributed a great deal to the development of the centre.

We have lost a highly esteemed colleague and companion. (jg)



More than just Plan B *by Jan Grabowski*

Sebastian Blockus has decided against the scientific career path. He works as a Medical Advisor at Nordmark Pharma GmbH.



Already during his doctoral thesis at the Institute for Experimental Virology, Sebastian Blockus decided to switch to industry after his PhD. "I identified an antiviral peptide against respiratory syncytial virus," he says. „That sparked my interest in drug development."

He learned how the change to industry can work in a seminar of the HZI graduate programme: Plan B - Alternatives to a Career in Science. "In the process, I realised that a career in academic research was never actually my personal Plan A," says Blockus.

Therefore, after his time at TWINCORE, he first trained to become a Clinical Research Associate. Soon he found a position as a research associate at the disinfectant manufacturer

Bode Chemie in Hamburg. He discovered his current position through his network on LinkedIn. "I wasn't actually looking for a new job, but the position seemed to be an ideal fit for me," he says. He has now been working for Nordmark Pharma in the Medical Affairs team in the Marketing department since September 2021.

Sebastian Blockus advises anyone who wants to work in industry to follow this path consistently: "If you don't want to stay in science, you don't have to go through a long postdoc phase." Instead, he recommends targeted training, be it in project management, quality management or regulatory affairs. Perseverance and patience are also needed if the transition doesn't work out right away.

Nevertheless, Blockus looks back positively on his time as a doctoral student. "I continue to use all the skills I learned at TWINCORE," he says. "Working independently, teamwork, intercultural competence or presentation skills are also needed every day in industry." He has also made many friendships here that persist.

However, there is one aspect of working in the lab he doesn't miss at all: "I don't miss sweating in the lab in the summer with long trousers and a thick cotton coat," he jokes.

Towards sustainability with an e-car *by Olivia Luise Gern*

Zero grams of CO₂ emissions are produced per 100 kilometres with the new electrically powered TWINCORE vehicle, according to the manufacturer. The predecessor had a diesel engine and was due for replacement anyway. The switch to an electric car is expected to improve the centre's carbon footprint.



The decision in favour of a fully electric vehicle and against a hybrid was mainly influenced by the most frequent driving routes: "When reviewing the logbook, it turned out that most routes are driven within the city area as well as the Hannover region," says Head of Administration Albrecht Goetz, "and of course to the HZI and back." Thomas Pietschmann made one of the first trips with the new e-car. "The range is absolutely sufficient for the round trip to Braunschweig," he says. "The ride comfort is quiet and pleasant."

From now on, whenever possible, the new e-vehicle will be the first choice for car trips. For longer journeys, however, the conventional Caddy will still be available. There are already plans to supply the TWINCORE, and thus also the new vehicle, with green electricity. In the

THIS AND THAT

Future Day

On 28 April 2022, Future Day was held as a face-to-face event at TWINCORE for the first time since the beginning of the corona pandemic. Six secondary school students took the opportunity to take a look behind the scenes at our research centre.

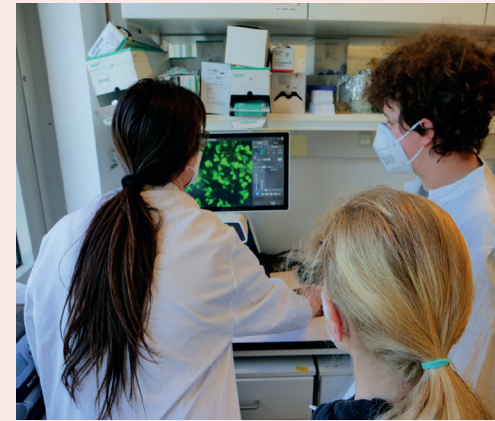


Photo competition

The results of the photo competition "Nature at TWINCORE" have been announced. The picture "Family adventure" by Marlene Hipp from the Institute for Molecular Bacteriology has won the contest. Second and third place went to the pictures "Nature Networking at TWINCORE" by Jelena Erdmann and "An Evening at TWINCORE" by Fakhar Waqas.



Specialist examination

Dr. med. Patrick Behrendt, head of the junior research group "Translational Virology" has successfully passed the exam to become a specialist in internal medicine in February 2022. Congratulations!

future, it is quite feasible to use photovoltaics or solar thermal energy, for example on the roof of the TWINCORE, to generate electricity or heat.



TWINCORE as a nature outpost

On 9 May, an information event was organised for the TWINCORE staff on the project "Außenstelle Natur". Project coordinator Noreen Hiery from the Umweltzentrum Hannover e.V. presented the idea and the objectives of the project. The aim is to provide more habitat for insects and birds by designing company premi-

ses in a more natural way. During a walk around the property Hiery explained to the eleven participants which measures are possible at TWINCORE in order to counteract the increasing decline of the number of insects. (jg)

Gender-sensitive language - Who is actually meant here?

by Antonia Gunesch

In a clear and gripping online lecture in March this year, the linguist Gabriele Diewald from Leibniz University in Hanover compared the German and English languages and analysed the problem of linguistic equality.

A short thought experiment: The staff of TWINCORE meet for an important vote. How sure are you that men are meant, how much are women addressed here? What would you need to be sure that you are wanted - the topic of the vote, a personal invitation, the consequences of the vote for me? Would there be a scenario in which one would be out of place? However, one thing is clear in terms of language: men are invited. This means that only female employees have to ask these questions, unless they are implicitly meant after all, don't they? Welcome to the center of the problem. And this is exactly the problem of the person who wants to convey something with his question.

Diewald explained in a most interesting way the entanglements and dead ends of the German language and also how it can be used

in a „genderfair“ way. Unfortunately, she said, there is not yet a perfect form, as work on the subject is still in development. Her recommendation is to use the language consciously, "appropriate to the situation, understandable, but also appealing". This could be achieved, for example, through the varied use of different gender-appropriate forms. The neutral form of the English 'the student', however, is a false friend, since in German there are two grammatical forms, 'der Student' and 'die Studentin', explains the professor of German studies.

In science, you need diversity, freshness, innovation. Therefore, communication should reach everyone, regardless of age, origin or gender. Ultimately, the individual should be addressed. "Language influences how you think and ultimately how you act!" This universal conclusion by Gabriele Diewald is the most important take-home message.

New employees at TWINCORE

Institute for Experimental Infection Research

Anna Engelhardt, *Student assistant*

Dr. Olga Klimenkova, *Referee to the Director of the Institute for Experimental Infection Research/ Management*

Aparna Shandeep, *PhD student*

Katharina Rahmel, *Master's student*

Institute for Experimental Virology

Benedikt Hellwinkel, *PhD student*

Natalie Köhler, *PhD student*

Dr. Benjamin Erik Nilsson-Payant, *PostDoc*

Junior Research Group Translational Virology

Dr. Elmira Aliabadi, *PostDoc*

Junior Research Group Translational Immunology

Christine Ehlers, *PhD student*

RESIST Research Group Computational Virology

Li Chuin Chong, *PhD student*

Research Group Pathogenesis of Bacterial Infections

Sebastian Koch, *Master's student*

Institute for Molecular Bacteriology

Benedikt Kennepohl, *Master's student*

Bianca Tuyet-Trinh Truon, *PhD student*

Anke Will, *Master's student*

Research Group Biomarkers for Infectious Diseases

Chutao Chen, *PhD student*

CiiM Group Computational Biology for Individualised Medicine

Philip Walldorf, *Master's student*

Dr. Zhenhua Zhang, *PostDoc*

CiiM Group Bioinformatics and Computational Genomics

Philip Walldorf, *Master's student*

Dr. Zhenhua Zhang, *PostDoc*

CiiM Group Bioinformatics and Computational Genomics

Dr. Nasim Safaei, *PostDoc*

CiiM Group Immunology of Viral Hepatitis

Erich Freyer, *StrucMed student*

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