

SAVE THE DATE! Summer Party: 13.08. & TWINCORE Symposium: 03.-04.09.



# COREnews

JUNE 2026



Dear Colleagues,

*the future looks bright: both the MHH's "INSPIREfutureHealth" application for excellence university status and the HZI's highly innovative research programme for the next phase of Programme-Oriented Funding (PoF V) are due to be evaluated in June. Preparations for these reviews have once again highlighted the exceptional potential of the HZI and MHH in the fields of infection research and infectious diseases.*

*Through the HIMH umbrella structure, we are working together with the CiiM to create the conditions for developing this potential in an even more targeted manner and setting new scientific priorities. The focus is on key questions for the future: How do we design an efficient and sustainable IT infrastructure? And how do we harness the possibilities of artificial intelligence to further develop research, administration and clinic-related processes?*

*With the establishment of our AI task force, we have taken an important step. It will help to better understand the requirements and needs of staff across all areas of TWINCORE and to develop concrete strategies for the responsible and effective use of AI.*

Kind regards,

  
Ulrich Kalinke



A new umbrella structure strengthens collaboration between HZI and MHH

## HELMHOLTZ INFECTION MEDICINE AT MHH (HIMH)

by Ulrich Kalinke

With the appointment of Yang Li to the Centre for Individualised Infection Medicine (CiiM) in 2019, the first CiiM group was established at TWINCORE. As the completion of the new CiiM research building was not yet in sight, this integration was designed to be long-term from the very beginning. In the years that followed, the CiiM groups led by Markus Cornberg, Cheng-Jian Xu and, later, Kathrin de la Rosa joined the centre. Today, around 50 CiiM staff members work at TWINCORE.

This physical proximity has fostered a close partnership that extends far beyond the shared use of infrastructure. The collaboration is characterised by joint events such as the Lunch Club and the TWINCORE/CiiM Symposium, a joint Scientific Advisory Board, and the jointly operated Board of Clinical Collaboration Partners. The future of this partnership was discussed at the 2024 retreat in Greifswald. The key conclusion: to secure and fur-

ther develop the successful cooperation even after the CiiM groups have moved into the new research building, a joint umbrella structure is required.

Following intensive discussions with the HZI, the MHH, the clinical collaboration partners, and the TWINCORE boards, the concept was refined and finalised at a retreat in St. Johann in 2025. In early 2026, the HZI and MHH signed a cooperation agreement to establish a joint umbrella structure, to be named Helmholtz Infection Medicine at MHH (HIMH).

HIMH raises the profile of the joint research mission of TWINCORE and CiiM, strengthens the collaboration between TWINCORE and CiiM, and creates a framework for establishing shared infrastructure, developing new research networks, and the sustainable further development of the HZI-MHH cooperation axis.

# SHAPING SUSTAINABILITY TOGETHER

by Natascha von Herz

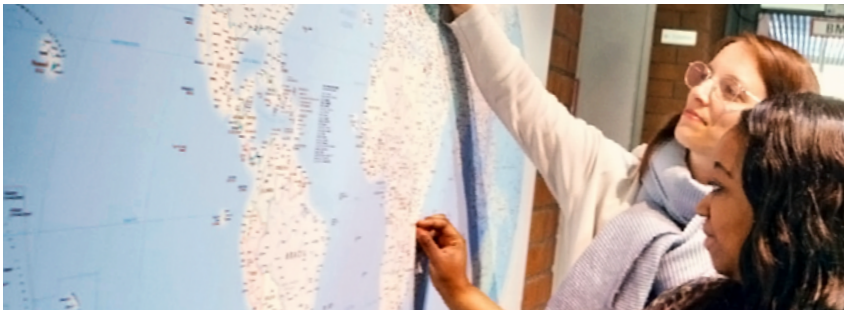
At the beginning of 2026, the former Sustainability Working Group at TWINCORE was further developed and restructured as an open Sustainability Initiative. The aim was to strengthen the understanding of sustainability as a shared responsibility: accessible, voluntary, and open to all employees. The initiative not only focuses on ecological sustainability, but also on social responsibility and the question of how we can work together in a future-oriented way.

The Sustainability Initiative sees itself as a platform for exchange, ideas, and inspiration from everyday working life. One of its central new formats is the monthly Sustainability Lunch. During these shared lunch breaks, participants discuss a wide range of sustainability-related topics. All employees are invited to join, whether regularly to take part in discussions, occasionally to contribute specific topics, or simply once to share a meal together. The main focus is on exchange and mutual inspiration. Initial ideas may also develop into smaller project groups that further explore topics independently.

The broad understanding of sustainability at TWINCORE also became evident during this year's German Diversity Day, a nationwide initiative by Charta der Vielfalt, in which TWINCORE participated for the fourth time. Under the motto "Diverse Origins – One Goal," the event highlighted what shapes our everyday work: people with a wide variety of backgrounds, perspectives, and stories working side by side in infection research.

The event was organized by dedicated employees from different departments of TWINCORE. During two joint breaks, staff members were able to try donated snacks from different home countries, ranging from French madeleines and Persian coconut cookies called Shirini Nargili to the Nigerian peanut snack Kuli-kuli. The day was complemented by a small Hobby Fair, which gave employees the opportunity to exchange ideas about shared and diverse interests.

A newly installed two-meter world map in the lobby also invited employees to mark their hometowns with colourful stickers. The map will remain permanently displayed at TWINCORE, allowing future employees to add their own stickers and continue making the diversity at TWINCORE visible.



This same idea is also reflected in the newly developed guideline for gender-inclusive language. It provides information on the use of inclusive language and offers guidance for everyday work. As an international and diverse research center, we aim to send a clear signal in support of respectful and appreciative communication.

The Sustainability Initiative aims to bring people together, inspire new ideas, and create space for exchange. In this way, we hope to implement many more activities together and further strengthen sustainability at TWINCORE.



## IN MEMORY OF VERA LANGER

On 30 May 2026, our long-serving colleague Vera Langer passed away at the age of 77.

She had been part of the service team since TWINCORE was founded in 2008, and her dedication shaped life at the centre. Particularly during events, she ensured with great care that our guests always felt welcome and well looked after. Even after her retirement, she remained connected to TWINCORE and continued to support the team regularly as a substitute.

Vera always had a listening ear, a kind word and, more often than not, a cup of coffee at the ready. With her warm nature and helpfulness, she was, for many, the heart and soul of the organisation. We will remember Vera Langer with gratitude. (jg)

## THIS & THAT

### New telephone system

Since January 2026, TWINCORE has a modern IP-based telephone system. Some extension numbers have changed; the current list can be found on our website.

### Founder trees

The fruit trees planted in 2019 on the occasion of the 15th TWINCORE Symposium in honour of the two founding fathers of TWINCORE, Prof. Rudi Balling and Prof. Dieter Bitter-Suermann, were in full bloom this spring.



### Future day

Once again this year, TWINCORE opened its doors on Future Day and gave 12 school pupils an insight into the research work carried out at the centre.



### Bicycle repair station

Staff can now use the new repair station next to the bicycle racks for minor bicycle repairs. In addition to a bike stand, tools and a pump are available there.



# FRIENDS OF THE MHH PHD AWARD FOR DR CHRISTINE EHLERS



*Dean of Research Prof. Meike Stiesch, award recipient  
Dr. Christine Ehlers, supervisor Dr. Dr. Theresa Graalman, and  
Prof. Siegfried Piepenbrock, Chair of the Society of Friends of MHH*

Former TWINCORE PhD student Christine Ehlers has been awarded the PhD Award by the Friends of the MHH for her thesis entitled "The role of innate immunity in the pathogenesis of inflammatory skin diseases". She received the award during the MHH graduation ceremony on 8 May 2026.

From February 2022 to September 2025, Christine Ehlers conducted research regarding the role of myeloid cells in inflammatory skin diseases as part of the "Translational Immunology" Clinical Junior Research Group led by Dr. Dr. Theresa Graalman. The role of this group of cells from the innate immune system in systemic and local inflammatory reactions was previously unknown. The new findings are intended to enable more precise treatment of inflammatory skin diseases in the future.

During her PhD, Christine Ehlers was the first author of two scientific publications in international journals. Since early 2026, she has been a postdoctoral researcher and coordinator of a DFG Research Training Group at Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel.

This award for Christine Ehlers is already the 23rd doctoral prize that doctoral students at TWINCORE have received over the past 18 years. (jg)

## CHANGE OF LEADERSHIP AT TRAIN

Since March 2026, Dr Sara Haag has been heading the office of the Translational Alliance in Lower Saxony (TRAIN). She took over from Prof. Ulrich Kalinke, the Executive Director of TWINCORE. He had been at the helm of TRAIN since 2013 and, during this time, drove forward the networking of life sciences research institutions in the Hanover-Braunschweig-Göttingen region. We wish Dr Sara Haag every success in tackling the challenges ahead in the field of biomedical translation. (jg)



## PERSPECTIVES FOR OUR RESIST PROFESSORS

*TWINCORE extends funding for Chris Lauber and Marco Galardini*

In 2020, the two bioinformaticians Chris Lauber and Marco Galardini launched their junior research groups at TWINCORE. For the first five years, their professorships were funded by the RESIST Cluster of Excellence. The work of the two scientists has now been evaluated at the end of this funding phase. The outcome is encouraging: both Chris Lauber and Marco Galardini will remain at TWINCORE.



**Chris Lauber** has led the Computational Virology junior research group at TWINCORE since June 2020 and held a W1 professorship within the RESIST Cluster of Excellence. His research focuses on virus discovery and evolution, viral taxonomy, the role of viromes in health and disease, and susceptibility factors for severe viral infections. His work of the past five years has recently been positively reviewed. His research will now receive further funding for an initial period of three years.



**Marco Galardini** established his group on Systems Biology of Microbial Communities at TWINCORE in October 2020. He investigates how genetic variants correlate with phenotypic variability between bacterial strains, both generally and in the context of infections. The evolution of antibiotic resistance and its dependence on microbial pangenomes is also a research area of the laboratory. His W2 professorship has also been funded by RESIST to date.

Following the positive evaluation of his research activities, he can now continue his work in Hanover. In January 2026, he was appointed W2 Professor at Hannover Medical School and has since been a full member of the TWINCORE teaching staff. (jg)

New employees

# WELCOME AT TWINCORE!

**Clinical Junior Research Group  
Translational Immunology**  
Tobias Berg, student assistant  
Phil Mentz, student assistant  
Ruben Reimer, PhD student

**Helmholtz Junior Research Group  
Antiviral Antibody Omics**  
Angelica Lau, intern  
Jan Schmidt, Master's student

**Institute for Experimental Virology**  
Vincent Coger, Technician  
Dr David Zöller, Postdoctoral Researcher

**Junior Research Group  
Computational Virology**  
Fabio Filippini, PhD student  
Alonso Cid Padilla, PhD student

**Clinical Junior Research Group  
Translational Virology**  
Moritz Arndt, intern

**Junior Research Group Systems  
Biology of Microbial Communities**  
Alessio Masoni, PhD student  
Dominik Schymosch, intern

**Institute for Molecular Bacteriology**  
Leon Becker, PhD student  
Greta Krüger, Master's student

**Research Group Biomarkers for  
Infectious Diseases**  
Xuetong Ding, PhD student  
Liv-Grete Reinhardt, intern

**JOBS  
AT TWINCORE**



## MILLIONS IN FUNDING FOR TWINCORE PROJECTS

*A total of around €3.7 million for rare diseases and RSV*

Two research projects led by TWINCORE scientists have been awarded substantial funding over the past six months:

The OPERA project, led by Prof. Thomas Pietschmann, Director of the Institute for Experimental Virology, is receiving €999,000 from the Volkswagen Foundation to optimise active substances against the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). In addition to Pietschmann's team, the Helmholtz Institute for Pharmaceutical Research Saarbrücken, the Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research Braunschweig, the University of Lübeck and Hannover Medical School are participating in OPERA as collaborative partners. The aim is to improve the efficacy of antiviral agents and also to adapt the formulation so that it can be inhaled. The French company ENYO Pharma SA will subsequently take over the commercial development. The Translational Project Management Office of the German Centre for Infection Research is responsible for the accompanying project management.



*Have a reason to celebrate:  
Theresa Graalmann and Yannic Bartsch*

Dr Theresa Graalmann, MD, PhD and Prof. Yannic Bartsch secured a substantial €2.7 million in funding from the 'zukunft.niedersachsen' grant programme for the Predict CTD project. Over the next five years, the two junior research group leaders from the Institute for Experimental Infection Research aim to develop improved diagnostic options for rare rheumatic diseases such as lupus erythematosus or systemic sclerosis, in

collaboration with further partners from Hannover Medical School. Their aim is to enable personalised and targeted treatment for patients, thereby improving the management of these complex and rare diseases. The project utilises state-of-the-art multi-omics technologies such as genetic diagnostics and immunological phenotyping. (jg)

## AI TASK FORCE ESTABLISHED

It is now almost impossible to imagine our daily lives without artificial intelligence. Even in scientific laboratories, chatbots and large language models (LLMs) such as Claude, Le Chat or Copilot can assist researchers in analysing data or visualising experimental results. But which applications are actually useful? How can reliable processes be established? Which tools handle intellectual property securely and meet data protection requirements?

These are the questions being addressed by the AI task force newly appointed at TWINCORE in early 2026. The three members are active in different areas of the research centre and bring diverse expertise and perspectives to the group's work.

Bioinformatician Prof. Marco Galardini works with large volumes of data that are virtually impossible to analyse manually, and therefore uses AI in his day-to-day research. Among other things, he gives lectures on how data analysis can be automated and thus simplified with the help of AI.

Natascha von Herz is the strategic advisor to the head of administration and data protection coordinator at TWINCORE. She is currently playing a key role in developing TWINCORE's AI policy and ensures the secure and data-protection-compliant use of the new technology at the centre. In addition, she is investigating which administrative processes can be optimised through the use of AI.

Dr. Jan Grabowski, Coordinator of Communications, regularly uses generative AI in the day-to-day work of press and public relations. He is familiar with the creative potential as well as the limitations of common tools and supports staff from all areas of the center in using AI in various communication processes.

The task force promotes the productive and secure use of AI tools. In a monthly consultation hour, questions are answered, ideas are shared, and best practices are presented. It also organizes workshops and lectures with internal and external speakers. (jg)

### IMPRINT

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