

# Press-Release



**April 24, 2006**

## **Paul Martini Prize 2006 awarded for clinical-therapeutic pharmaceutical research**

### **Award for the discovery of cardiac "guardian angels"**

Wiesbaden, April 24, 2006 (PMS). In 2004, 368,000 people in Germany died from cardiovascular diseases, making this the number one cause of death. This number would have been much larger, if the human body didn't have ways of protecting the heart from damage during anoxemia in the best possible way. Together with his staff, Prof. Dr. Bodo Levkau of the University of Essen has shed light on a previously unknown mechanism: Based on this principle, so-called high-density lipoproteins act as "guardian angels" for the heart by circulating in the blood and effecting the dilation of blood vessels. Today, Levkau's research was honored with the EUR 25,000 Paul Martini Prize, which is awarded every year by the Paul Martini Foundation, Berlin, for outstanding achievements in clinical-therapeutic pharmaceutical research. The award celebration took place during the annual meeting of the German Society for Internal Medicine (DGIM) in Wiesbaden.

High-density lipoproteins (HDL) are formed by the liver and released into the blood. In medicine, they have long been known as "transporters for recyclable products" that collect excess cholesterol all over the body and bring it to the liver where it is processed. Levkau's research focused on how HDL can also get coronary and other blood vessels to dilate, thereby enabling a better blood supply and more oxygen for their environment. In a clinical study, he showed that patients with high HDL plasma levels (probably as a result of it) have a lower risk of suffering cardiac muscle damage during coronary surgery. In animal trials, he also demonstrated that this is not just a long-term effect. Instead, the risk of cardiac muscle damage can also be reduced in the short term by injecting HDL or a certain component of HDL directly before cardiac surgery. This research laid the foundation for new diagnostic procedures and improved therapies for various cardiac diseases.

During the award ceremony, the Munich-based internist Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Peter Scriba emphasized that Professor Levkau's work represents a good example of the kind of research in which laboratory results are quickly implemented in clinical applications for the benefit of the patients.

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## **The award winner**

In 2004, Prof. Dr. med. Bodo Levkau (40) was appointed to the Dr. H.-H. Deichmann Endowed Chair for Atherosclerosis Research at the Institute for Pathophysiology at the Essen University Clinic. Previously, he served as head of the working group for "Cardiovascular Signal Transduction and Apoptosis" at the Leibniz Institute for Arteriosclerosis Research at the University of Münster. He has been interested in lipoproteins ever since he completed his dissertation at the Hamburg-Eppendorf University Clinic in 1994. As part of his studies and research, Levkau, who was born in Sofia, Bulgaria, also spent time in Houston and Seattle.

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## **The Paul Martini Foundation**

*The non-profit Paul Martini Foundation, Berlin, supports the advancement of pharmaceutical research as well as the research of drug therapy and works to expand the scientific dialog about pharmaceutical research and development between medical scientists at universities, hospitals, the research-based pharmaceutical industry, other research institutions and government agencies.*

*The foundation was established in 1966 by the seven German pharmaceutical companies that were organized in Medizinisch-Pharmazeutische Studiengesellschaft (Society for Medical and Pharmaceutical Studies). In 1994, the Berlin-based German Association of Research-based Pharmaceutical Companies (VFA) with its 39 member companies assumed sponsorship of the foundation.*

*The foundation was named after the outstanding scientist and physician from Bonn, Professor Paul Martini, in honor of his special achievements and service with regard to the advancement and continued development of clinical-therapeutic research, which he impacted significantly for decades with his "Methods of Therapeutic Examination" published in 1932. The prize awarded annually by the foundation for outstanding clinical research is also named in his honor.*