

Paul Martini Prize 2009 awarded

Better treatment of sepsis and lymphoma: Clinical researchers pave the way

Page 1/2

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Wiesbaden, April 20, 2009 (PMS). This year, two medical achievements have won the Paul Martini Prize, which is awarded for outstanding achievements in clinical-therapeutic pharmaceutical research: Prof. Dr. med. Ralf C. Bargou was honoured for the first evidence that a novel active ingredient is effective against one form of lymphoma. Prof. Dr. med. Frank Martin Brunkhorst and Dr. med. Christoph Engel received their prize for proving that two measures with which sepsis patients had been treated for many years are ineffective. The award celebration took place as part of the annual conference of the German Society for Internal Medicine (DGIM) in Wiesbaden. The prize is awarded each year by the Paul Martini Foundation, Berlin, in the amount of EUR 25,000.

Prof. Dr. med. Ralf C. Bargou heads the Early Clinical Development Unit at the University Clinic, Würzburg, where he first tested the novel antibody blinatumomab against one form of lymphoma, the so-called B-cell non-Hodgkin lymphoma. In laboratory trials, the genetically engineered antibody had already shown that it can "tie" immune cells to cancer cells, which kills the latter. It had also proven successful in animal trials. In 2008, Bargou was able to successfully test the antibody for the first time on 38 patients. Even in small concentrations, blinatumomab frequently fought the cancer cells and was tolerated well. While years and many additional studies will be necessary to prove how sustained the effect is and what risks are associated with this treatment, Bargou's study has laid the foundation for these efforts.

For years, **Prof. Dr. med. Frank Martin Brunkhorst**, University Clinic Jena, and **Dr. med. Christoph Engel**, University of Leipzig, have been doing research as part of the Competence Network Sepsis funded by the German Ministry of Education and Research. Sepsis – often also referred to as "blood poisoning" – is a life-threatening complication of infectious diseases that affects many organ systems.

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Much has been attempted to stabilize the bodily functions of sepsis patients, but only a few measures have been validated.

In a study, Brunkhorst and Engel were able to show that two long-established measures – infusions with hydroxyethyl starch solution and insulin injections in particularly high doses – did not provide the sepsis patients with a survival advantage but increased the rate of complications. These results have changed the treatment of sepsis patients worldwide ever since. In another study, the two physicians also noticed that the significance of sepsis in Germany has been underestimated many times over: With about 60,000 deaths per year – according to their result – sepsis is the third most frequent cause of death.

Page 2/2

"The honoured projects show that clinical researchers can make contributions to the medical field that are just as valuable when they pave the way toward new therapies as when they put therapeutic measures to the test that had not been previously proven," said the chairman of the jury, Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Peter C. Scriba of Ludwig Maximilians University, Munich, in his congratulatory remarks.

The Paul Martini Foundation

This Berlin-based non-profit foundation 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 is sponsored by the German Association of Research-based Pharmaceutical Companies (VFA), Berlin, with its 47 member companies.

The foundation was named after the outstanding scientist and physician from Bonn, Professor Paul Martini (1889 - 1964), 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 honour.