

1242 November 30th, 2012

Press Release



Concentrated competencies in the fight against infectious diseases

HZI and the Robert Koch Institute sign collaboration agreement

Press date: December 6, 3:15 pm.

Two leaders in the field of infection research are planning on bundling their expertise in the future. Scientists at the Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research (HZI) in Braunschweig and at the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) in Berlin and Wernigerode will be sharing their resources and potentials to find answers to pressing questions of infection research and epidemiology. The two research institutes' directors will sign the agreement on December 6.

Bacterial antibiotic resistance, vaccine development, and new insights into the epidemiology and ecology of pathogenic bacteria - these are topics that the HZI and the RKI will approach together in the future. As a member of the Helmholtz Association, the HZI's long-term research goal is to maintain and improve the human condition. The centre contributes decisively to this goal by providing the basis for new diagnostic tools, drugs, and therapies. The focus is on conducting basic research. At the RKI, one of the world's oldest biomedical research institutes, applied and measure oriented work is carried out. It is the national Public-health institute in Germany. The most important work areas are the control of infectious diseases and the analysis of long-term health trends within the population. With regard to the recognition of new health risks, the RKI has an "antenna function" in terms of a rapid alert system.

HZI and RKI scientists are already working together on common questions. For instance, Prof. Petra Dersch, head of one of HZI's research departments, is studying pathogenic bacterial strains that were isolated from patients and previously characterized at the RKI. Both facilities are planning on working together more closely in the future. Prof. Dirk Heinz, HZI's scientific director, is convinced that "the agreement will continue to strengthen our collaborative partnership as well as facilitate joint research projects." "The institutes' scientific exchange promises several synergistic effects that will benefit the general public in the long run," explains RKI's president Prof. Reinhard Burger.

One of the goals is new antibiotic development, which is desperately needed in light of increasing resistance of many pathogenic bacteria. Experts are certain that the new collaboration would be promising in terms of methodologies as well. As such, the scientists are interested in developing new vaccines and diagnostic tools for the detection of infectious diseases.

The institutes also aim at conducting joint epidemiological research. What is the etiology of a particular disease? How do diseases spread? What course do they take? Quantifying the answers to these questions and making predictions is the job of epidemiology. For some time now, Prof. Gérard Krause has been the embodiment of both institutes' functional aspects: Not only does he head RKI's Department of Infectious Disease Epidemiology, representing Germany in several international networks in this capacity - since last year, he also heads HZI's Department of Epidemiology. Krause sees one of the collaboration's advantages in "the two departments' distinct methodological approaches, which complement each other perfectly."

On December 6, Prof. Heinz and Prof. Burger will be signing the collaboration agreement at a symposium. Following the signing, media representatives are invited to a press date at 3:15 pm. For additional information, please call (+49) 531-61811401.

The Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research (HZI):

The Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research contributes to the achievement of the goals of the Helmholtz Association of German Research Centres and to the successful implementation of the research strategy of the German Federal Government. The goal is to meet the challenges in infection research and make a contribution to public health with new strategies for the prevention and therapy of infectious diseases.

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