

Press Release

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HONOURING OF EXCELLENT PHD STUDENTS THE TASK FORCE “ARBEITSKREIS ZELLBIOLOGIE UND BIOMEDIZINISCHE FORSCHUNG“ REWARDS TWO PHD THESES ON INTERFERONS

For the tenth time already, the “Arbeitskreis Zellbiologie und Biomedizinische Forschung e.V.“ rewards young scientists at the Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research (HZI) for excellent achievements connected with their PhD theses. This year, the prize money of 2000 euros is split between two junior scientists.



Helmholtz-HZI/Heinz Gramann

The first thesis by Dr Johannes Schwenk dealt with the question of how invisible herpes *viruses* can be controlled. Those *viruses*, also called latent *viruses*, usually remain unrecognised during the first *infection*. An outbreak only takes place in cases of stress, *immunodeficiency* or illness of the *host*. If, however, an outbreak takes place, it can be very dangerous and even lead to death. In his thesis, Schwenk was able to show the important role the interferon system plays in preventing outbreaks of latent *viruses*. Up until then, scientists only knew about the importance of the interferon system in inhibiting primary infections.

The second honoree, Dr Sharmila Nair, also discussed the interferon system in her PhD thesis. She examined ways to intensify the impact of interferons. This is important, since many *viruses* have developed mechanisms to avoid the protective effect of interferons. Nair showed that a factor activated by interferons (IRF-1) is crucial for ensuring the effectiveness of interferons and, main of all, to cope with viral infections in the central nervous system. IRF-1 prevents infections of certain parts of the brain and suppresses the spreading of the virus in those regions.

“New insights in science often result from hard work in laboratories done by master students, degree candidates, and PhD students”, says Gerhard Gross, chairman of the “Arbeitskreis Zellbiologie und Biomedizinische Forschung e.V.“. “With our prizes we want to honour the dedication of such junior scientist and encourage them on their ways.”

The “Arbeitskreis Zellbiologie und Biomedizinische Forschung e.V.“ was founded in June 1991 by nine scientist working in the field of molecular biology at the former GBF. The task force provides quick and unbureaucratic help in case funding of fundamental research is not possible or takes too long to apply for. Since its foundation, the task force has organised several congresses and awarded many grants. Its focus is set on prizes for talented PhD students und young Post-Docs as well as on the festive dismissal of scientist of outstanding merit.

The **Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research (HZI)** 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. www.helmholtz-hzi.de