

PRESS RELEASE**A Total of Half a Million Swiss Francs for Two Research Projects on Cancer Stem Cells**

Zurich, November 3, 2015 – This year’s Swiss Bridge Award goes to Andreas Trumpp from the German Cancer Research Center in Heidelberg and to Joerg Huelsken from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL). Both scientists share in the CHF 500 000 endowed prize; divided equally in half for each.

This year, the Swiss Bridge Foundation has given its prize to research work being done on the topic of cancer stem cells. Stem cells can renew themselves continuously and are more resistant than other cells. That’s why they are gaining importance in cancer research: these cells are often responsible for recurrence of tumours, metastasis and therapy failures.

A total of 45 scientists and scholars submitted project proposals to the 15th edition of the Swiss Bridge Awards. A nine-member jury of international experts carried out a two-stage evaluation procedure and made their final decision to award highly promising research projects from Germany and Switzerland. The prize shall be awarded at a ceremony at noon today.

Metastatic Cells in the Blood

Andreas Trumpp’s team, which heads the German Cancer Research Center’s Department of Stem Cells and Cancer in Heidelberg, recently identified cells in breast cancer patients’ blood which can spontaneously form new offshoots – or metastasis. Through his newly funded CHF 250 000 project, Andreas Trumpp wants to distinguish tumour cells circulating in the blood as comprehensively as possible, in order to detect what differentiates an ordinary circulating tumour cell from a metastasis-forming stem cell. Not only could these insights provide the basis for new and better diagnostic methods, but they could also feasibly show the vulnerabilities of these stem cells. Such potential points of attack could conceivably help in the future to suppress the formation of lethal metastases.

Immunosuppressive Properties

The team lead by Joerg Huelsken at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL) has recently shown that cancer stem cells are not only resistant to chemotherapy and radiation therapy, but that they also play a major role in regulating the body’s immune system. The immune system would actually be able to recognize and eliminate malignant cancer cells, but the cancer stem cells slip through its control. Apparently, these cancer stem cells succeed in inhibiting the immune system’s function. In this new project, also funded with CHF 250 000, Huelsken wants to decode the immunosuppressive properties of these cancer stem cells. If this proves successful, the results could help to give the emerging immunotherapy even greater potential.

The Swiss Bridge Foundation was founded in 1997, upon the initiative of its former Managing Director and current Foundation Board Member, Thomas Hoepfli, with the support of the Swiss Cancer League. Their goal is to financially support high-quality research projects in the fight against cancer, along with the help of private donors and foundations. Since its founding, the Swiss Bridge Foundation has awarded over CHF 25 Million for research work in Belgium, Brazil, England, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland.

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