

Press Release

Heinrich Wieland Prize 2013 goes to Professor Tony Kouzarides **Epigenetics pioneer honored for research on gene regulation and cancer**

Munich, October 10th, 2013. His research on cancer captures the public's interest, giving hope for new drugs against leukaemia. These hopes are grounded in Professor Tony Kouzarides' breakthroughs in the field of epigenetics, that studies cellular mechanisms regulating which pieces of our genetic information are active. For his pioneering and dogma changing discoveries in the field of epigenetics as well as their impact on cancer, Tony Kouzarides from the Gurdon Institute in Cambridge, UK, receives the Heinrich Wieland Prize 2013. This internationally renowned prize is awarded annually by the Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation and endowed with 50,000 euros. The ceremony, together with a talk by the Tony Kouzarides, will take place in Munich on October 10th, 2013. Former awardees include the freshly announced Nobel laureate James E. Rothman as well as three other Nobel Laureates.

Our genetic information is written in about three billion characters of overall two meters length. It is tightly coiled around proteins in the cell's nucleus, with the whole complex of DNA and its packing material called chromatin. Which sections of the genetic information cells use – and when – is crucial for development and often defines the fine line between health and disease. About 20 years ago, Tony Kouzarides was one of the first to show that so-called epigenetic modifications of the packing material of DNA can regulate which genes are active and which are not. "Tony Kouzarides has identified numerous proteins that modify chromatin and has furthered our understanding of these important processes fundamentally and repeatedly over the years" says Professor Wolfgang Baumeister, chair of the selection committee of the Heinrich Wieland Prize. "As one of the internationally recognized leaders in epigenetics, he has been at the forefront from the beginning: from the early discovery of one of the first chromatin modifying enzymes in 1996 to the demonstration in 2011 that the small molecule inhibitor I-BET is of potential use for the treatment of leukaemia."

Over the years, Tony Kouzarides has not only identified several proteins that modify chromatin, but also their mode of action and the pathways in which they are involved. Furthermore, he has shown that several of these modifications are associated with cancer when not regulated correctly. Targeting these modifications, he is aiming to find new drugs against cancer. The drug I-BET is one promising candidate. Working with mice and human cell lines, Tony Kouzarides demonstrated that I-BET has a strong potential against certain kinds of leukaemia. The I-BET drug is currently in clinical trials, underlining the applicability of Tony Kouzarides' work to finding new therapies. The clinical potential of I-BET gives hope for the development of epigenetic therapies against cancers.

Professor Tony Kouzarides is a Royal Society Professor at the University of Cambridge and Deputy Director of the Gurdon Institute, Cambridge, UK. He received his PhD in virology at the University of Cambridge and worked as a postdoctoral fellow at MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology where he was already set on studying cancer. He then went to NYU Medical Center in New York, working on cancer-inducing genes. He returned to Cambridge in 1989 to lead a research group at the Gurdon Institute where he has been ever since. Besides his busy academic career, Tony Kouzarides founded the drug discovery company “Chroma Therapeutics” and the publicly traded antibody reagent company Abcam plc. He is also the founder of the Spanish charity “Vencer al Cancer” (Conquer Cancer), raising public funds for cancer research.

The **international Heinrich Wieland Prize** honours outstanding research on biologically active molecules and systems in the fields of chemistry, biochemistry, and physiology as well as their clinical importance (www.heinrich-wieland-prize.de). The 50,000-euro prize is named after Heinrich Otto Wieland (1877-1957), a Nobel laureate and professor of chemistry at the University of Munich. The Heinrich Wieland Prize has been awarded annually since 1964. Former awardees include Nobel laureates Michael S. Brown, Joseph L. Goldstein, and Bengt Samuelsson as well as the freshly announced Nobel laureate in Medicine James E. Rothman. Since 2011, the prize is endowed by the Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation, a non-profit organization committed to the promotion of the medical, biological, chemical, and pharmaceutical sciences (www.boehringer-ingelheim-stiftung.de).

The public **award ceremony** takes place on **October 10th, 2013 from 2 to 4 PM** at Buchner Auditorium of LMU Munich (Department of Chemistry and Pharmacy, LMU Munich, Butenandtstr. 5-13, House F, Room FU 1.013, 81377 Munich, Germany). Prof. Kouzarides will give a lecture on „**Epigenetic regulation of genes and cancer**“.

Members of the media are welcome. Please RSVP at kirsten.achenbach@bifonds.de.

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