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Award for outstanding studies in cancer research

Her ground-breaking research studies on the regulation of gene activity have earned Dr Angelika Feldmann the Hella Bühler Prize for 2026, which is endowed with 100,000 euros. The award, granted by Heidelberg University, goes to young researchers at the Heidelberg research location who have already drawn attention to themselves through the outstanding scientific quality of their cancer research. Dr Feldmann's research focuses on the question of how certain regulatory DNA sequences work as "enhancers" and wrongly activate genes or enhance their activity. This mechanism can cause these "enhanced" genes to trigger uncontrolled cellular growth as oncogenes. The scientist heads the junior research group "Mechanisms of Genome Control" at the German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ). The award ceremony is taking place on 7 May 2026.

Oncogenes are over-active versions of normal genes that lead to uncontrolled cellular growth. How what is called "enhancer hijacking" sparks this activation is the subject of Dr Feldmann's research. With this mechanism, the enhancers bind to certain DNA regions that regulate the start of genetic activity as promoters. Although the enhancers are often far away from a gene, they can make contact with the promoter through DNA folding and looping. It is not yet known whether, and if so when, such physical contacts are actually necessary in order to wrongly activate genes or enhance their activity. Elucidating the origin of the excessive transcriptional activation of oncogenes in detail is the goal of Dr Feldmann's project "The Role of Promoter Contacts for Enhancer Function in Developmental and Tumorigenic Gene Activation". To achieve this, she is conducting her research jointly with Prof. Dr Daniel Niopek from Heidelberg University's Institute of Pharmacy and Molecular Biotechnology.

Angelika Feldmann studied Molecular Medicine at the University of Freiburg, followed by research conducted at the Friedrich Miescher Institute for Biomedical Research in Basel (Switzerland), where she worked towards her doctorate (2014) in the field of genetics. She then spent time as a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Oxford (UK), and moved to Heidelberg to head a Helmholtz Young Investigator Group at the German Cancer Research Center in 2021. The scientist has received multiple awards and funding for her research studies, notably an ERC Starting Grant from the European Research Council (ERC) in 2023. In the context of her ERC project Dr Feldmann is investigating the molecular processes that are necessary for all cells to be able to read the right genes at the right time as an organism develops.

Prof. Dr Frauke Melchior, Rector of Heidelberg University, will open the Hella Bühler Prize award ceremony. Then the topic will be the studies conducted by last year's prize-winners; neurologist Dr Dr Varun Venkataramani (Heidelberg University Hospital) is reporting on them in a video message. Standing in as a speaker for biochemist Dr Moritz Mall (DKFZ) is doctoral candidate Laura Rueda Gensini. The tribute to the present prize-winner will come from Prof. Niopek, head of the Department of Pharmaceutical Biology at the Institute of Pharmacy and Molecular Biotechnology. Finally, Dr Feldmann will give insights into her research in a short presentation.

The research prize donated by the Heidelberg dentist Dr Hella Bühler (1910 to 2002) goes to early-career researchers at Heidelberg University or to young researchers involved in scientific collaboration with Ruperto Carola. The award aims to support the prize winners at an early stage in their careers in continuing and deepening their already outstanding achievements in the field of cancer research. Granted by the university, it is one of the most valuable awards in the field of cancer research in Germany.

Press release

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Source: Heidelberg University

Further information

- Mechanisms of Genome Control| Dr. Angelika Feldmann| DKFZ
- University of Heidelberg