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CRIION Joachim Frank Prize 2026 awarded to cancer researchers in Freiburg

On Thursday, 25 June 2026, several Freiburg cancer researchers were honoured at the presentation of the CRIION Joachim Frank Prize 2026. Among them was Prof. Dr Robert Zeiser, who received the Prize for Biomedical Research. Prof. Dr Jürgen Finke, PD Dr Florian Scherer and PD Dr Elisabeth Schorb of the University Medical Center Freiburg, together with Prof. Dr Gerald Illerhaus of Stuttgart Hospital, were awarded the Prize for Clinical Medicine.

The CRIION Joachim Frank Prize recognises outstanding scientific achievements that bridge the gap between theoretical research and clinical application. It is awarded by the Collaborative Research Institute Intelligent Oncology (CRIION) and the BioThera – Mertelsmann Foundation in cooperation with the University of Freiburg. The prizes were presented in person on 25 June 2026 at the Haus zur Lieben Hand at the University of Freiburg by Prof. Dr Joachim Frank, a Nobel Laureate in Chemistry and professor at Colombia University who holds multiple honorary doctorates.

This year, the CRIION Joachim Frank Prize was awarded in two separate categories for the first time: biomedical research and clinical medicine. The prize money of 25,000 euros was divided equally between the two categories. Several cancer researchers from Freiburg were honoured, including Prof. Dr Robert Zeiser, who received the prize for Biomedical Research. Zeiser is a member of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Freiburg and of the CIBSS – Centre for Integrative Biological Signalling Studies, a Cluster of Excellence at the University of Freiburg, as well as a research group leader at the Medical Center – University of Freiburg.

Biomedical Research Prize awarded to Prof. Dr Robert Zeiser

Zeiser, who was honoured in 2025 with Germany's highest research award, the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize, has been conducting research for many years into how stem cell transplants can be made safer and more effective in cancer treatment. "Through his outstanding scientific achievements, Mr Zeiser is making a pioneering contribution to improving human health in the field of stem cell transplantation," said Frank. By unravelling complex immunological mechanisms, his team has developed new therapeutic approaches that reduce dangerous rejection reactions by the immune system and improve patients' chances of survival.

Clinical Medicine Prize awarded to four researchers specialising in CNS lymphomas

Four researchers have been awarded the CRIION Joachim Frank Prize for Clinical Medicine in recognition of their work, which has made a significant contribution to the field of CNS lymphoma research: Prof. Dr Jürgen Finke, PD Dr Florian Scherer and PD Dr Elisabeth Schorb from the Medical Center – Unviersity of Freiburg, and Prof. Dr Gerald Illerhaus from Klinikum Stuttgart (each receiving prize money amounting to 3,125 euros). The four medical researchers specialise in the study and treatment of primary CNS lymphomas, rare and often aggressive tumours of the central nervous system. Under Freiburg's leadership, several groundbreaking international studies were conducted, including the world's largest randomised trials on the subject: the MATRix/IELSG43 trial, involving 346 patients from 56 international centres, and the MARTA trial have established new treatment standards and significantly improved the therapeutic options for this complex disease.

Close collaboration between the University, the Medical Center and the Mertelsmann Foundation

The evening was hosted by Jun.-Prof. Dr Maria Kalweit, Chief Scientific Officer at CRIION and holder of the CRIION Chair in Bioinformatics – funded by the Mertelsmann Foundation – with a focus on artificial intelligence for oncology research at the University of Freiburg. Prof. Dr Michael Schwarze, Vice Rector for Academic Affairs at the University of Freiburg, delivered a welcoming address, emphasising the importance of close collaboration between the University, the Medica Center and the foundation for Freiburg as a centre of research. "This occasion reminds us of the responsibility that comes with scientific

excellence and of the privilege of working at an institution that takes this responsibility seriously. I would like to thank the 'BioThera – Roland Mertelsmann Foundation' and CRIION for establishing this prize and for their ongoing commitment to research and teaching at our university. I offer my heartfelt congratulations to Professor Zeiser and the CNS Lymphoma Research Group," said Schwarze.

The event was accompanied by music performed by members of the University Orchestra. In addition to the prizes, works of art by two young artists from the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste Stuttgart (State Academy of Fine Arts in Stuttgart) were also presented.

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Further information

- University of Freiburg