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Universität Heidelberg: Humboldt professorship for leading international researcher

In order to further strengthen Heidelberg University as an internationally recognized location of infection research, Prof. Dr Mathias Lichterfeld has been selected for an Alexander von Humboldt Professorship endowed with 7.8 million euros. Leading international academics are granted this most valuable of German research awards to enable them to conduct long-term, cutting-edge research at German universities. A virologist and infectious disease physician, Prof. Lichterfeld works at the interface of basic research and clinical medicine in order to develop curative strategies for HIV infection – an objective that has remained elusive to date. Mathias Lichterfeld – Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School – currently conducts research at leading institutions in Boston (USA). Nominated by Ruperto Carola, he is to transfer to the Medical Faculty Heidelberg and play a key role in advancing the Center for Integrative Infectious Diseases Research.

Prof. Lichterfeld's research focuses on the mechanisms that allow HIV to persist in the human body despite effective antiretroviral treatment, which currently requires lifelong administration. This also involves the processes that enable viral rebound after treatment is discontinued. Particular attention is paid to HIV-infected immune cells, in which the virus remains latent but replication-competent for life. Using state-of-the-art single cell and sequencing technologies, Prof. Lichterfeld and his team examine the vulnerabilities of these cells and develop strategies for their targeted elimination. In parallel, his team analyzes the responses of these infected immune cells to therapeutic interventions in the context of human clinical trials. Other emphases of his research include viral reservoirs and antiviral immune responses in newborns, children, and adolescents. Prof. Lichterfeld has made groundbreaking contributions, particularly in the area of pediatric HIV research. His work aims to generate fundamental insights into how the immune system can be activated in a targeted manner to recognize and eradicate persistent viral reservoirs.

With Mathias Lichterfeld, Heidelberg University wants to attract a world-class scientist and physician to the Heidelberg location who is recognized in the scientific community as a top-level representative of his field of research and work. Besides the outstanding scientific qualifications of candidates for a Humboldt Professorship, a crucial factor is the strategy of the universities, which are expected to offer the researchers and their teams lasting prospects in Germany. Prof. Lichterfeld's appointment is intended to further enhance the outstanding profile of Heidelberg University's Medical Faculty Heidelberg and of Heidelberg University Hospital in infection research with a focus in virology, in particular regarding the translation of basic research results in interventional clinical studies. Mathias Lichterfeld currently does research at the Ragon Institute of Mass General Brigham, MIT and Harvard, a leading center for collaborative biomedical research. He also works as an infectious disease physician at the Massachusetts General Hospital and at Brigham and Women's Hospital, the two principal teaching hospitals affiliated with Harvard Medical School.

International academics who have a leading position worldwide in their field can be nominated for the Alexander von Humboldt Professorship. The intention is that – with the support of the highly endowed prize – their research studies can make a sustainable contribution to the international competitiveness of Germany as a research location. The professorship is awarded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and financed by the Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space. The prize money is meant for financing the first seven years of their work. Up to ten professorships can be granted annually. After successful appointment negotiations with the respective universities, the prizes will be awarded next year.

Press release

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Further information

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