

Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum and Merck KGaA Agree to Cooperate in the Field of Intestinal Cancer Research

The members of the Management Board of the Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum (German Cancer Research Center) in Heidelberg, Professor Harald zur Hausen and Dr. Josef Puchta, and the head of Biomedical Research at Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, Dr. Claus-Jochen Schmitges, recently signed a cooperation agreement concerning intestinal cancer research. Within the framework of Merck's preclinical pharmaceutical research (headed by Dr. Inge Lues), related research efforts of the Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum will receive funds amounting to one million DM within three years.

The term "intestinal cancer" refers to malignant neoplasms of the colon and rectum. Intestinal cancer is the second most frequent cause of death from cancer in Germany, where it annually affects about 23,000 men and about 28,000 women usually between ages 50 and 70. The chance of recovery depends largely on the stage of the cancer at the time of diagnosis. Up to now, surgery has been the most promising treatment for this type of cancer.

New avenues in the treatment of intestinal cancer could possibly be opened up if researchers were to succeed in determining tumor-specific proteins. To keep up their uncontrolled growth and cover their exceptionally high need for energy, cancer cells typically produce proteins which are not or virtually not found in a healthy cell. To detect these proteins using computer-aided molecular-biological methods is the aim of Dr. Bernhard Korn and the head of the Division of Molecular Genome Analysis at the Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum Professor Annemarie Poustka in cooperation with researchers from Merck KGaA. The results obtained could enable scientists to systematically develop drugs that inhibit these proteins. In addition, the findings could help to find new methods of early diagnosis and to better assess the stage of the disease so as to provide more individual and specific treatment options.

The task of the Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum in Heidelberg (German Cancer Research Center, DKFZ) is to systematically investigate the mechanisms of cancer development and to identify cancer risk factors. The results of this basic research are expected to lead to new approaches in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer. The Center is financed to 90 percent by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and to 10 percent by the State of Baden-Wuerttemberg. It is a member of the Helmholtz Association of National Research Centers (Helmholtz-Gemeinschaft Deutscher Forschungszentren e.V.).

This press release is available at www.dkfz.de/pressemitteilungen

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