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Professor Donald E. Ingber Receives the 2018 Friedrich Merz Guest Professorship

The Harvard professor studies miniaturized organ systems made of human cells

Frankfurt, November 21, 2018 – The American cell biologist Donald E. Ingber has been appointed to the 2018 Friedrich Merz Guest Professorship. The Professor for Bioengineering at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, studies miniaturized living organ systems consisting of human cells. These can be used to study diseases, test new therapeutic options, and obviate animal testing. This year, Merz is funding the guest professorship in the fields of medicine and pharmacy for the 28th time.

“We are honored that such a highly respected scientist as Professor Donald Ingber would accept the Friedrich Merz Guest Professorship,” says Dr. Stefan Albrecht, Chief Scientific Officer at Merz. “What we as a company find particularly fascinating is that the miniature organ systems he has developed can be used not only to study diseases but also to reduce or replace animal testing. In the past years, Merz has also carried out extensive research in this field. And our modern, cell culture-based testing method for examining the biological activity of our botulinum toxin has enabled us to significantly reduce animal testing.”

Donald E. Ingber, who has received numerous international awards and honors for his research, is the Founding Director of the Wyss Institute for Biologically Inspired Engineering at Harvard University. The interdisciplinary research institute focuses on the development of new biologically inspired materials and devices for applications in the fields of healthcare, production, robotics, energy, and sustainable architecture. With his work, Ingber has also contributed to breaking down barriers between science, art, and design. In 2015, Foreign Policy magazine chose him as its Leading Global Thinker and the London Design Museum named his Organs-on-Chips technology Design of the Year. Ingber has authored over 430 publications, holds 150 patents, and has founded five companies.

On Wednesday, December 5, a scientific symposium will be held with Professor Ingber and other international experts on the topic “Modeling health and diseases: from in vitro design to future therapies”. The symposium will be held at the Biozentrum, Lecture Hall B1 on the Riedberg Campus from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

At the public forum on Thursday, December 6, citizens will have the chance to participate in a discussion with Professor Ingber. The forum’s topic is: “Human organs and diseases in a test tube: fiction, or a realistic alternative to animal testing?” Since the transferability of data from animal experiments to the human body is in many cases impossible due to differences in species, valid human test systems are urgently needed. Highly developed microreactor systems with human cells now allow the realistic replication of human tissue and disease symptoms, culminating in personalized medical applications.



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How valid is animal testing really? Which human organs can be replicated in a test tube, and how can science profit from them? How can the future of personalized medicine with patients' own personal organ systems be shaped? In addition to Professor Ingber, the experts Professor Maike Windbergs (Pharmacy, Goethe University), Dr. Madeleine Martin (Animal Welfare Officer for the state of Hesse), and Dr. Stefan Albrecht (Chief Scientific Officer Merz) will also be joining the discussion. The event will be moderated by Professor Manfred Schubert-Zsilavecz, Vice President of the Goethe University. The public forum, which is free of charge, will be held in the Arkadensaal of the Goethe House (Grosser Hirschgraben 23-25 in Frankfurt) on December 6 at 6 p.m.

More information on the Friedrich Merz Guest Professorship can be found at: <http://www.goethe-university-frankfurt.de/Friedrich-Merz-Visiting-Fellowship-Endowment?locale=en>.

The Friedrich Merz Guest Professorship

The Friedrich Merz Guest Professorship, endowed in December of 1985 on the occasion of the 100th birthday of the eponymous company founder and first awarded in 1987, is one of the oldest chairs for visiting professors at Frankfurt's Goethe University. Friedrich Merz was one of the first members of the Senckenbergische Gesellschaft and thus had close ties with the Goethe University in Frankfurt and was a patron of science. The purpose of the Guest Professorship is to invite a highly respected scientist from the field of pharmaceuticals or human medicine to work at Frankfurt's Goethe University each year. Awarded for the first time in 1987, it has been awarded every year since then, with just two exceptions. Together with the symposium, which presents a spectrum of topics ranging from basic research to health care research, the Guest Professorship offers researchers from both the academic world and the industry the opportunity to participate in an annual exchange of knowledge and to build a foundation for further collaboration in the future.

About Merz

Merz is a global, family-owned aesthetics and neurotoxin company based in Frankfurt, Germany. Privately held for 110 years, the company is distinguished by its commitment to innovation, long-term perspective, and focus on profitable growth. In addition to its comprehensive portfolio of aesthetic and skincare products, Merz also develops neurotoxin therapy to treat neurologically-induced movement disorders. In fiscal year 2017/18, Merz generated revenue of EUR 1,024.4 million. The Merz Group has a workforce of 3,151 employees and a direct presence in 28 countries. More information is available at www.merz.com.

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