

PRESS RELEASE

The ISREC Foundation and EPFL announce the creation of the Paternot Chair in Interdisciplinary Cancer Research

Lausanne, 3 October 2023. The ISREC Foundation and EPFL (Ecole polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne) are pleased to announce the creation of the Paternot Chair in Interdisciplinary Cancer Research, led by Professor Nicolas H. Thomä. The chair, which is supported by a CHF 7.5 million donation from the ISREC Foundation, is named in honor of Yves Paternot, a committed patron and former president of the Foundation, who passed away in 2016. Building on his work, the chair will aim to fast-track progress in translational oncology.

The ISREC Foundation, which actively promotes collaboration between basic research and clinical studies in the fight against all forms of cancer, has joined forces with EPFL's School of Life Sciences to create a new chair in interdisciplinary cancer research. The chair will contribute new technologies and innovative approaches to existing EPFL research groups working on novel cancer therapies. The ISREC Foundation will support the chair with a CHF 7.5 million donation, spread over six academic years.

The chair is held by Prof. Nicolas H. Thomä, a German researcher who was recently appointed as full professor at EPFL's School of Life Sciences. Prof. Thomä comes from the Friedrich Miescher Institute for Biomedical Research in Basel where, since 2006, he led a world-class team of researchers in structural and chemical biology. In September 2023, Prof. Thomä has started his research at EPFL in Lausanne.

Prof. Thomä is a chemical biologist and expert in X-ray crystallography and cryogenic electron microscopy, two cutting-edge technologies which he uses to study the key protein assemblies involved in human diseases. He is responsible for a number of groundbreaking discoveries in the key structures and molecular interactions involved in the targeted degradation of pathological proteins, paving the way for new approaches to drug discovery in cancer. In recognition of his pioneering work, Prof. Thomä received the Otto Naegeli Prize, one of the most prestigious Swiss medical research awards, in 2022. He is also one of only a handful of researchers to have secured three consecutive European Research Council grants (in 2010, 2015 and 2020).

After completing his PhD at the University of Cambridge (UK), Prof. Thomä carried out his postdoctoral research with Roger Goody at the Max Planck Institute of Molecular Physiology (Dortmund, Germany), focusing on protein-ligand interactions. In 2001, he joined the laboratory of Nikola Pavletich at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (New York, United States) to complete his training in X-ray crystallography. He became group leader at the Friedrich Miescher Institute in 2006.

A longstanding tradition of philanthropy

The ISREC Foundation has a longstanding tradition of supporting translational research in French-speaking Switzerland. It created the EPFL Chairs in Translational Oncology led by Prof. Oliver Hantschel (2012–2017) and Prof. Elisa Oricchio (2015–2020), as well as the Chairs in Oncology currently led by Prof. Mikael Pittet and Prof. Denis Migliorini at the University of Geneva. The Foundation was also responsible for the construction of the AGORA cancer research cluster, a facility housing around 300 medical and clinical researchers including doctors, biologists, geneticists, immunologists, bioinformaticians and bioengineers. Working together under one roof, the cluster's 30 research groups are addressing the many and varied challenges posed by cancer – a disease whose impact will only grow as our society ages.

Today, the ISREC Foundation is continuing its work to foster collaboration within the scientific community in the Lake Geneva region and to shape a new generation of specialists capable of conducting original research and engaging in direct clinical practice. The Foundation focuses its support in particular on the application of artificial intelligence, data analytics and other new technologies for early cancer diagnosis and innovative therapies.

Through this decisive donation, the ISREC Foundation is proud to be supporting the new EPFL chair and contributing to its vital research. The Foundation looks forward to seeing the medical advances that will come from the work of Prof. Thomä and his team, who are building on the foundations laid by pioneers such as Yves Paternot.

About the ISREC Foundation

The ISREC Foundation was founded in Lausanne in 1964 by Prof. Henri Isliker as the Swiss Institute for Experimental Cancer Research. A private foundation and an accredited organization of public interest supervised by the Swiss federal government, it is exempted from taxes on inheritance and donations. The ISREC Foundation selects and supports cancer research projects, with a particular emphasis on projects that promote knowledge transfer and collaboration between basic research and clinical applications. It also supports up-and-coming scientists and academics active in these areas. It focuses its work on three key areas: funding translational oncology research, creating and operating the AGORA cancer research cluster in Lausanne, and training young scientists and clinical specialists in Switzerland. The ISREC Foundation is led by its president, Pierre-Marie Glauser, and its director, Prof. Susan Gasser, an internationally respected epigeneticist. It is overseen by a Foundation Council and by a Scientific Board composed of experts of international renown in various fields of medical and scientific research.

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