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Frank Uhlmann of London Research Institute wins "EMBO Gold"



Frank Uhlmann Winner of the 2006 EMBO Gold Medal.

Dr Frank Uhlmann of Cancer Research UK's London Research Institute is the winner of the 2006 EMBO Gold Medal. He receives the award *"in recognition of a decade of extraordinary work that has revolutionised our understanding of the cell cycle and opened the door to new possibilities in cancer treatment,"* said EMBO Executive Director, Frank Gannon.

The EMBO Gold Medal is awarded annually to a young European researcher for outstanding contributions to research in the molecular life sciences. Widely regarded as the most prestigious award of its kind in Europe, the Gold Medal highlights the standards being reached by European researchers – bringing the very best of these to the attention of a global audience.

German-born Frank Uhlmann is a perfect example of the "golden" career that sets apart all EMBO medal winners. After completing his PhD at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York, he spent three years in Kim Nasmyth's group at Vienna's Research Institute of Molecular Pathology (IMP), before taking up a position at the London Research Institute in 2000.

During his time at IMP, Uhlmann combined novel techniques in biochemistry, cell biology and genetics to uncover the trigger for one of the most significant events in the life of eukaryotic cells – mitosis, the process whereby cells divide and split their duplicated genomes between two daughter cells. He found that a protein, now called "separase", cuts cohesive links between the duplicated chromosomes, triggering their movement towards the daughter cells.

Unravelling mechanisms like these is key to understanding how mistakes in mitosis can lead to cancer – knowledge that could eventually lead to the development of new strategies for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of the disease.

Kim Nasmyth's praise for Uhlmann's work during his time at the IMP is unequivocal: *"Frank was an extraordinarily successful post-doc. He was not merely a pair of supremely competent hands in the lab. I don't think that the experiments he performed would have taken place without his special blend of technical competence, good judgement and fearlessness."*

Uhlmann has continued to put these qualities to good use since joining the London Research Institute. As Head of the Chromosome Segregation Laboratory, he has built on his earlier discoveries – defining modes of separase regulation and uncovering other ways in which the protein orchestrates intricate processes during mitosis and ensures that separated chromosomes move away from each other successfully. His group has also gone on to decipher the role of another crucial protein, called "cohesin", on a genome-wide scale.

Richard Treisman, Director of the London Research Institute, is certainly convinced of Uhlmann's abilities: *"We were delighted to welcome Frank to Cancer Research UK six years ago. He has pursued world-class research on the processes of cellular division, advancing our fundamental understanding of how these systems work and providing clues to how they may be disrupted in cancer."*

Uhlmann has published over 40 papers, a number of these in high-impact journals such as Nature, Cell or Science. In addition to the EMBO Gold Medal, he has received several other awards including the 2005 Hooke Medal from the British Society for Cell Biology.

In 2002, he was selected for the EMBO Young Investigator Programme, a highly competitive programme renowned for its scientific excellence.

On hearing the news of the EMBO Gold Medal, Frank Uhlmann said:

"I am absolutely delighted by this award. So many researchers work hard to contribute to our molecular knowledge of cells and organisms. It has been fantastic to find myself doing research in this exciting environment. I very much enjoy participating in European science at many levels, so to get this recognition from EMBO makes me particularly happy."

The EMBO Gold Medal and an award of 10,000 euro will be presented on 15 October 2006 at the EMBO Members Meeting, Frontiers of Molecular Biology, in Sheffield, UK.

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