

**Laudatory speech for the Postdoctoral Award Winners Dr Ahmed Nabil Hegazy, Dr Médéric Diard and Dr Gisa Gerold  
by Prof. Dr Jörg Hacker**

[Check against delivery.]

[Address]

Young scientists play a key role with their innovative ideas and for passing on knowledge into the future. Their knowledge, dedication and creativity in developing new ideas and solutions make major contributions to great scientific achievements.

As a result, the Robert Koch Foundation, together with the German Societies for Hygiene and Microbiology, Immunology and Virology, presents three awards to outstanding young scientists annually. Each year, these societies - DGHM, DGfI and GfV - are asked to nominate suitable award winners. From the shortlists provided by the societies, the Scientific Advisory Council and the Board of Directors of the Robert Koch Foundation choose the respective award winners.

[Robert Koch Postdoctoral Award for Virology]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year's Postdoctoral Award for Virology goes to Dr Gisa Gerold from the Institute for Experimental Virology at TWINCORE in Hanover.

Ms Gerold's research focuses on cell biological and immunological aspects of infection with the hepatitis C virus. Among other things, she analysed entry mechanisms of the hepatitis C virus and the species tropism of the hepatitis C virus. Ms Gerold also developed an innovative approach to studying essential protein-protein interactions on virus infection of host cells, combining mass spectrometry-based protein analysis methods with virological methods. The method allowed her to explain the cellular processes that occur when viruses enter the host cell.

Ms Gerold has already successfully published her research results – including lead-authored publications in Nature Immunology, Hepatology and PNAS.

Ms Gerold studied biochemistry at the University of Tübingen and Montana State University in Bozeman. She earned her doctorate at Humboldt University of Berlin, while researching at the Max Planck Institute for Infection Biology under Professor Arturo Zychlinsky. She then initially worked at the Max Planck Institute for Infection Biology in Berlin and subsequently at the Laboratory of Virology and Infectious Diseases at Rockefeller University in New York. Since 2012 she has been researching at the Department for Experimental Virology at TWINCORE in Hanover. Her research has already been recognised with the Max Planck Society's Otto Hahn Medal.

Dear Ms Gerold, please accept my sincere congratulations on winning the Robert Koch Postdoctoral Award.

[Robert Koch Postdoctoral Award for Immunology]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year's winner of the Postdoctoral Award for Immunology is Dr Ahmed Hegazy from Charité Berlin.

Mr Hegazy analyses the cellular mechanisms underlying human inflammatory diseases. He focuses on the interactions between microbiota and the host. In particular, he investigates the role of microbiota-reactive CD4 T-cells and aims to identify new cytokine signal paths for chronic-inflammatory diseases for therapeutic purposes. He recently succeeded in showing that the oncostatin M cytokine signal path leads to enteritis in mice and humans.

Mr Hegazy has already published his research findings with outstanding success. To mention but a few, he recently published an article in Nature Medicine, as well as papers in Immunity and Science.

Mr Hegazy studied medicine at the University of Cairo and Hanover Medical School. He earned his doctorate in Hanover and a second doctorate in immunology from Humboldt University of Berlin – based on research performed at the Rheumatism Research Centre Berlin. During this time, he spent two years at the Institute for Experimental Immunology at University Hospital Zurich as a visiting researcher. From 2012 to 2017, he worked as a postdoc at the Kennedy Institute for Rheumatology at the University of Oxford. Mr Hegazy currently works as a scientist at Charité Berlin and leads an independent research group at the German Rheumatism Research Centre in Berlin.

I would also like to congratulate Mr Hegazy sincerely on winning the Robert Koch Postdoctoral Award.

[Robert Koch Postdoctoral Award for Microbiology]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year, the Robert Koch Postdoctoral Award for Microbiology goes to Dr Médéric Diard from ETH Zurich.

Mr Diard has achieved outstanding results in the field of evolutionary dynamics of pathogenic bacteria. In particular, he studied the virulence of salmonella typhimurium, including selection for virulence under antibiotic treatment and the influence of the host immunity on the dynamics of the horizontal gene transfer during the infection.

He demonstrated on salmonella that the body's intrinsic inflammatory reaction fosters the transfer of phage genes to bacteria, increasing the pathogenicity of salmonella. Mr Diard has published his results in Science. He also published successful articles in the journals PLOS One, Current Biology or Nature.

Mr Diard studied biochemistry and microbiology at Paris Diderot University, where he also earned his doctorate. He then worked at Paris Descartes University and has been employed at the Institute for Microbiology of ETH Zurich since 2009. This year, he has already been honoured with the Encouragement Award of the Swiss Society for Microbiology for his outstanding research.

And today he is receiving another award – the Robert Koch Postdoctoral Award – for which I would like to congratulate you sincerely.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to ask the three Robert Koch Postdoctoral Award winners to join me on stage to accept their certificates.