

Press Release: New Institute for Eye Research in Basel Unites Fundamental and Clinical Research

- The University of Basel, the University Hospital Basel and Novartis founded a novel research institute.
- At the Institute of Molecular and Clinical Ophthalmology Basel (IOB), basic researchers and clinicians will work hand in hand to advance the understanding of eye diseases and to develop new therapies for vision loss.
- The new institute will be headed by two leading experts in basic and clinical research, Prof. Dr. Botond Roska and Prof. Dr. Hendrik Scholl, and start its operations in 2018.
- In ophthalmology, innovation has been slow for many years, partly due to a lack of the biological understanding of eye disease mechanisms and partly due to a gap that needs to be bridged between basic research and clinical application.
- Collaboration between different scientific disciplines and between basic research scientists and clinicians is indispensable to develop new therapeutic approaches for vision loss. The IOB will address this challenge and be established as a collaborative organization.

Basel, 15.12.2017: The University of Basel, the University Hospital Basel and Novartis today announced the launch of IOB, the Institute of Molecular and Clinical Ophthalmology Basel. This new research institute will be constituted as a foundation, granting academic freedom to its scientists.

The institute will be led by two world-renowned experts in the field of ophthalmic research and ophthalmology, Prof. Dr. Botond Roska and Prof. Dr. Hendrik Scholl. Botond Roska, currently Senior Group Leader at the Friedrich Miescher Institute for Biomedical Research in Basel, is a pioneer in fundamental research on the retina and the processing of optic signals in the brain. Hendrik Scholl is Chairman of the Department of Ophthalmology at the University of Basel and Head of the Eye Clinic at the University Hospital Basel. He specializes in medical and surgical management of retinal diseases and especially inherited retinal degenerative diseases. Dr. Norbert Spirig, currently member of the Executive Board of the University Hospital Basel, has been appointed as Director of Operations of the IOB.

“For Novartis, ophthalmology is a strategic research priority” says Dr. Jörg Reinhardt, Chairman of the Board of Novartis. “That is why we support the groundbreaking collaboration between research and the clinic here in Basel and trust that the new institute will generate innovative solutions for patients suffering from vision loss.”

The new institute promises hope to the many patients suffering from currently incurable forms of vision impairment or vision loss. “Right now, there is a unique opportunity to launch such a specialized institute. Currently, we have limited treatment options for all of

our patients with blinding eye diseases”, says Dr. Werner Kübler, Director of the University Hospital Basel. “I am confident that the IOB will bring new hope to countless patients with eye diseases.”

The set-up of the institute is highly collaborative and interdisciplinary. “Today, groundbreaking innovations in healthcare are not simply achieved in a research lab but happen at the interface between academia, healthcare and industry” says Prof. Dr. Andrea Schenker-Wicki, President of the University of Basel. “With IOB we are providing such a platform, combining academic freedom, proximity to patients and a strong commitment to innovation.”

As one of the first of its kind on a global scale, IOB will bring together basic and clinical science for eye diseases within one organization. IOB will start its operations in 2018 and merge the existing work of Prof. Roska at the Friedrich Miescher Institute and Prof. Scholl at the Eye Clinic of the University Hospital Basel in a new organization.

The founders commit to fund IOB for its first ten years. Part of the funding may also consist in the provision of space, services or human resources, accounted for at market rates. Five years after initiation, it is forecast that the annual contribution of the founders will total CHF20m, broken down as follows: Novartis: CHF10m per year; USB: CHF3m per year; and University CHF2m per year. An additional CHF5m per year will be provided by the Canton of Basel-Stadt if the parliament agrees to the plan. Novartis will in any case not fund more than 50% of the total contribution. IOB is also expected to raise additional funding through research grants or further collaborations.

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www.iob.ch

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