Universität Basel

Department of Biomedicine

DBM Basel

Newsletter
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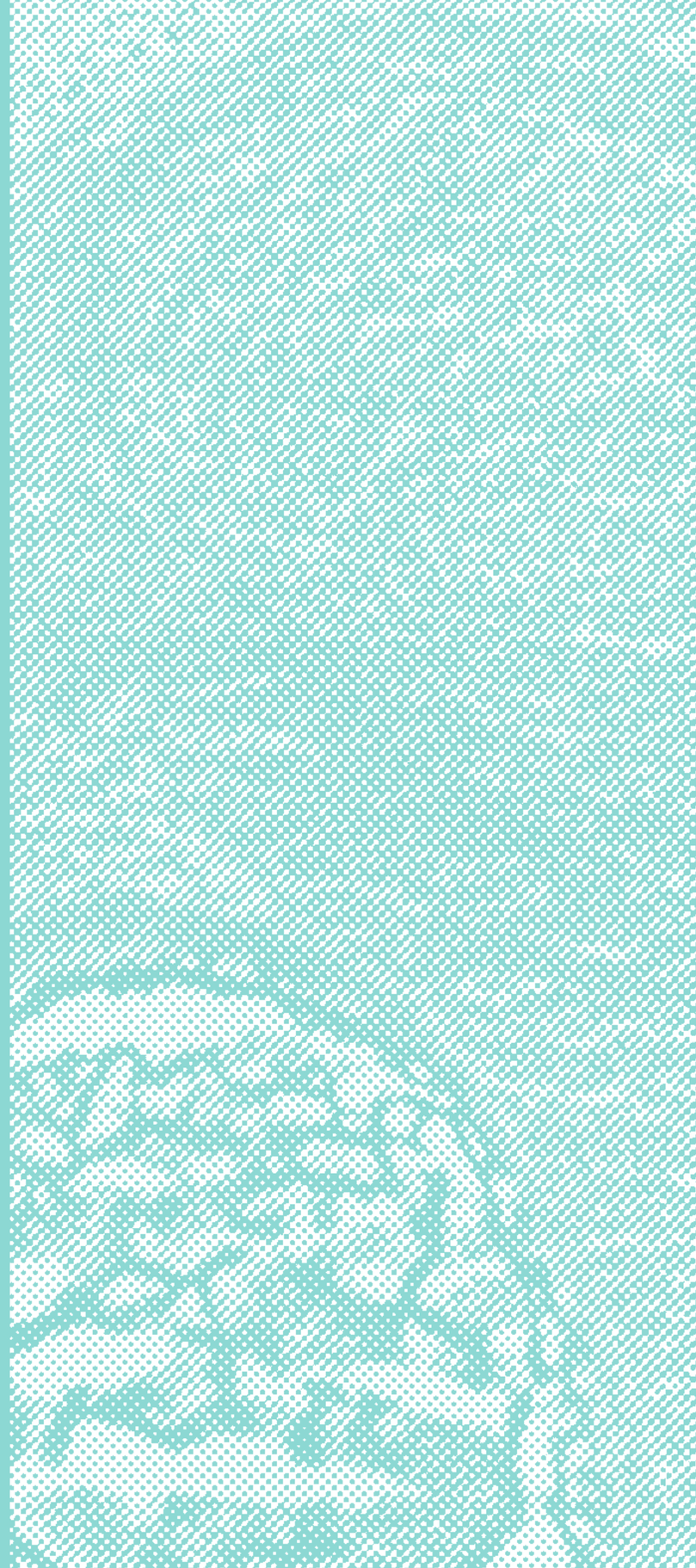
DBM
Basel
Department of
Biomedicine

Intro
Cover Story



DBM Basel

As we transition from a vibrant summer into an exciting remainder of the academic year, we have much to celebrate and reflect upon. This issue highlights the dynamic spirit of our community and the inspiring journeys of our members.

In our cover story, we are pleased to introduce four new research group leaders who have recently joined DBM. In their interviews, they discuss their exciting research agendas, their teams, and their vision for the future. Their diverse expertise and innovative approaches promise to enrich our community and open new avenues for collaboration and discovery.

Our success story features Simon Garaudé, a recent PhD graduate from our institute and one of this year's DBM Research Prize winners. Simon shares his passion for science, the reasons that led him to join the DBM, and his future aspirations.

Additionally, we have the pleasure to learn more about two of our Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) members. Their insights into the future directions of biomedical research and their guidance on maintaining excellence in our scientific endeavors are invaluable as we strive to elevate the impact of our work.

The highlight of the summer was our annual DBM Summer Symposium, where members gathered to share research advancements and exchange ideas. The day once again ended with a lively BBQ on a lovely summer day in August. As we look ahead, we remain committed to fostering a collaborative and innovative environment where curiosity thrives and breakthroughs happen. We hope this newsletter inspires you and keeps you connected to the exciting developments within our Department.

Success Story

Portrait SAB Members

Cover Story

Cover Story

Meet four of our new research group leaders

We are thrilled to introduce four of our new research group leaders that have recently joined the DBM community. In this edition, we highlight their experiences starting at DBM, their research focus, and their future aspirations.

Their teams are quickly taking shape, energized by the collaborative environment and the opportunities offered by the proximity of our institute to the University Hospital Basel. Beyond their research, they also share fun facts and inspirations — revealing a creative foodie and pop culture enthusiast, a nature-loving renovator, a passionate mountaineer, and a countryside adventurer among them.

We look forward to the groundbreaking contributions they will make to our scientific community!

Jean-Christophe Beltra
Investigator of T cell exhaustion

Jean-Christophe Beltra

Jean-Christophe Beltra, born in Perpignan, France, is a Cancer Immunologist with a Ph.D. in Immunology from the University of Montreal (Canada) and postdoctoral training at the University of Pennsylvania (USA). His pioneering Ph.D. work was among the first studies to demonstrate a role for cytokine signals in the developmental biology of exhausted CD8 T cells (Tex), now a prominent research area. Later during his postdoc, he uncovered new Tex subsets mediating the benefits of checkpoint blockade therapy and identified novel therapeutic axes to counter CD8 T cell exhaustion. In early 2024, he joined the Department of Biomedicine supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Parker Institute for Cancer Immunotherapy. His current research aims at identifying new strategies to modulate exhaustion and improve cancer immunotherapies.

How was your start at the DBM ?

I joined the DBM in March 2024, and I am both thrilled and grateful to be part of such a dynamic and vibrant community. Starting a lab has been an exciting yet challenging journey, but the warm and welcoming environment at the DBM has made the process remarkably smooth. The colleagues I've had the pleasure of interacting with, both at the Petersplatz location where my lab is based and across the department, have been immensely supportive, and I want to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to them. Even after seven months, I remain amazed by the peaceful atmosphere at the DBM, which provides the ideal conditions for focusing on my research. Since my arrival, I've already initiated collaborations with several research groups and look forward to the exciting projects and discoveries that lie ahead.

Cover Story

Jean-Christophe Beltra
Investigator of T cell exhaustion

Can you provide us with a brief overview of your research, how it fits into the DBM, your vision for the next five to ten years and the specific niche or specialization you aim to establish?

We are an immunology lab that integrates preclinical models to cutting-edge genetic perturbation tools, and epigenomic approaches to study the regulation of T-cell responses in infections and cancer. Our primary focus is on T-cell exhaustion, an immunosuppresssive process that weakens adaptive responses in chronic viral infections and cancer. As T-cell exhaustion poses a significant challenge to current anti-cancer immunotherapies, with few effective strategies available to counteract it, our lab is dedicated to advancing the understanding of this complex process. Our ultimate goal is to uncover innovative solutions to enhance the efficacy of immunotherapies.
We are thrilled to be part of the dynamic immunology community at the DBM and also benefit of fresh perspectives from this multidisciplinary environment. Over the next 5-10 years, I foresee our group making significant contributions to the research excellence at the DBM by driving high-impact discoveries in T-cell exhaustion and cancer immunotherapy. I am confident that with continued growth and integration of state-of-the-art tools and technologies, we will push the boundaries of exploratory research and foster groundbreaking innovations.
Looking ahead, I also envision our lab branching into synthetic biology, a crucial area that will bridge our foundational research with tangible therapeutic solutions in collaboration with the clinical oncolgy community at the DBM. My goal is for our lab to be recognized internationally as a leader in both T-cell research and immunotherapy, driving transformative advancements in these fields that will ultimately benefit patients.

What role does our institute and its proximity to the hospital play for your scientific aims?

We must always remember that the ultimate goal of our research is to benefit patients. In the case of cancer, it's unlikely that solutions will emerge from a single field of study; but rather from the collaborative efforts of a multidisciplinary team. The DBM clearly understands this and has successfully brought together a diverse community under the banner of "Biomedicine" to drive both clinical and fundamental research forward. For me as a researcher, this proximity to such a broad network is unvaluable – it broadens my vision, brings fresh perspectives, introduces new ideas and creates opportunities to refine our research tools and adapt our findings for therapeutic applications. Close collaboration with clinicians is also essential to ensuring our research aligns with real-world clinical needs and to validate our findings from preclinical models. I'm excited to work with the clinical oncology community at the DBM to develop new strategies for improving cancer immunotherapies.

" Cancer immunotherapies have revolutionized the field of clinical oncology, but CD8 T cell exhaustion remains a major obstacle. Our group aims at uncovering actionable pathways to overcome exhaustion and unleash the full potential of immunotherapies."

**Could you tell us something about your team?
Have you managed to establish your own lab yet?**

I'm thrilled to say that I've assembled an outstanding team! The people that joined my lab are driven by scientific curiosity, desire to innovate and, most important to me, they bring a positive energy in the lab that is extremely enjoyable. I am deeply grateful for their dedication and commitment and I'm excited to see what we will accomplish together in the coming years!

Fun fact/interesting fact about you that people would not know from your resumé:

When not in the lab pipetting or hiding in my office writing grants, you will likely find me experimenting new food recipes while enjoying a good wine - a pleasure I've rediscovered after six years in the U.S. I also love spending time outdoors, embarking on new adventures with my little family. I was born in the 80's so I am also a die-hard fan of pop culture and the Star Wars universe, and I am always up for a chat about either!

Cover Story

Anne Géraldine Guex
Bioengineering Innovator

Anne Géraldine Guex

Géraldine was born in Zürich and grew up in Fribourg, Switzerland. She studied Nanosciences at the University of Basel and then completed a PhD at the University of Bern. She then moved to Imperial College London, Empa in St. Gallen, and the AO Research Institute Davos to do a postdoc and work as a Research Scientist, respectively. Her early stage career was supported with Postdoc.Mobility Fellowships from the SNSF. Current research projects and her lab are supported by Dr. h.c. Thomas Straumann within the scope of the Stiftungsprofessur Orale Implantologie. She lives in Kleinbasel and enjoys being outdoors – for coffee, lunch, scientific brainstormings, swimming in the Rhine or climbing.

How was your start at the DBM?

I had a really great start and felt very welcomed. The Management Team did a fantastic job in creating this new category "Associated Group Leader" and I am glad for this opportunity. With our labs and teams being based at the University Center for Dental Medicine Basel, I am certainly less involved in day-to-day activities compared to groups directly located at the ZLF. Nevertheless, everyone at the DBM was extremely helpful and supportive. We experienced some delivery issues with certain chemicals, and I was very grateful that teams at the DBM could help out with aliquots and reagents without hesitation. Similarly, we were offered to use machines and devices, should our new lab not yet be fully equipped. I much appreciate this open culture and mutual support, it was absolutely vital for my start as a new PI.

Can you provide us with a brief overview of your research, how it fits into the DBM, your vision for the next five to ten years and the specific niche or specialization you aim to establish?

Dental implants are the preferred method for replacing lost teeth. Despite their high survival rate, there is no "one-fits-all" solution, and clinically challenged patients, such as those with insufficient bone, are at times not adequately supported. Our goal is to address this challenge by ultimately providing patient-specific solutions, primarily focusing on bone augmentation and implant materials. To achieve this, we are developing predictive 3D *in vitro* models to gain a deeper understanding of cell-material interactions. We engineer scaffolds using electrospinning to provide a suitable environment for progenitor or stromal cells to undergo osteogenesis. In a recently started project, we are examining the correlation between macrophage responses to architecturally and chemically distinct dental implant materials and subsequent bone remodeling in *in vitro* models. This clinically driven research, with the aim of elucidating complex events in physiology and pathophysiology through the use of *in vitro* models, fits well into the DBM. In the next 5 to 10 years, we hope that these 3D models can bridge the gap between first-line *in vitro* assays and in vivo studies.

What role does our institute and its proximity to the hospital play for your scientific aims?

For successful bench-to-bedside translation, we must adopt an interdisciplinary, holistic approach that integrates knowledge from basic research, industry, and clinical practice. At the UZB, where dental clinics, research, and education are located under one roof, inputs and needs from clinicians can be turned into research questions and projects. With the DBM, this connection is now further expanded to clinicians in other fields, such as craniomaxillofacial surgery and immunology, among others. Their insights into clinical challenges and "real-world-situations" will help us to stay focused on the bigger picture and structure our research accordingly. Furthermore, we work with patient-derived primary

Cover Story

Anne Géraldine Guex
Bioengineering Innovator

cells. The close proximity to the hospital and the dental clinic allows us to receive these precious samples (extracted teeth) for cell isolation. A privilege that cannot be emphasised enough and for which I am very thankful.

> **"In our lab, we have fun with biomaterials, electrospinning, and mammalian cells. We study cell-material interactions and aim to decipher the effect of environmental cues on cell fate decision."**

Could you tell us something about your team? Have you managed to establish your own lab yet?

Our lab is up and running! After nearly a year of planning, shopping and an intense hiring process, we are now happy to have a fully equipped BSL2 lab, and a dynamic team. Our team now includes a PhD candidate, a Postdoc, a cell lab technician and three early-stage researchers working on their master's thesis or dissertation (for the M Dent Med or Dr med. dent. degrees). Additionally, a research intern and a master's student from Nanosciences joined us for a six-month period, further complementing our team.

Fun fact/interesting fact about you that people would not know from your resumé:

There are not too many hidden facts about me. A quick Google search will reveal that I am also the president of the "Akademische Alpenclub Basel" (AACB) and generally passionate about climbing, mountaineering, and ski touring. Contradictory to this and disbelieved by many, I am really not a big fan of hiking – it's just an unfortunate necessity to reach the climbing spots ;-)

Kirsten Mertz
Molecular Pathologist

Kirsten Diana Mertz

Kirsten Mertz was born in Stuttgart, Germany. She studied in Ulm and Bonn (Germany), Memphis (USA) and Jerusalem (Israel). She then moved to Boston for a postdoc at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School. After 2½ years in Boston, she took a second postdoc position in Vienna (Austria). She received several awards, including the Pfizer Research Prize in 2016 and 2019. Her pioneering research on emerging novel pathogens and host-pathogen interactions led to a better understanding of acute and chronic infections, as well as the role of the immune system in these processes. She lives with her family in Füllinsdorf and enjoys life and nature in the rural region of Baselland.

How was your start at the DBM ?

I had a running start at the DBM, with incredible support from fellow scientists, clinicians, associates, and the administration. I am grateful for the warm welcome by an enthusiastic and supportive community. This has made my start smooth and motivating. One of the most striking aspects at the DBM is the collaborative atmosphere. The access to cutting-edge resources and the opportunity to engage with brilliant scientists from various disciplines has been truly inspiring, and the interdisciplinary spirit of the DBM aligns perfectly with the vision I have for my lab. I cannot wait to see how our research evolves in this dynamic environment, and I look forward to contributing to scientific excellence at the DBM.

Cover Story

Kirsten Mertz
Molecular Pathologist

Can you provide us with a brief overview of your research, how it fits into the DBM, your vision for the next five to ten years and the specific niche or specialization you aim to establish?

My research focuses on the bidirectional nature of host-pathogen interactions within tissues. The progression of infections is shaped by both the impact of pathogens on surrounding tissue and by the tissue's response to pathogens. We take inspiration for our work from clinical observations. As such our research has two starting points: Patients presenting with clinical symptoms of suspected but unknown infectious origin, or confirmed infections with unusual tissue reactions. We are also interested in how the course of infection changes when a patient's susceptibility is altered, such as in tumor patients or patients receiving immunomodulatory treatments.
The tissue, and more specifically the immune system that resides in tissues, influences disease development, progression, and treatment outcomes. To analyze these processes, we combine clinical observations with cutting-edge molecular techniques and traditional histopathology. My mid-term goal is to establish a reference center for infectious pathology that integrates clinical science, basic research, and technological innovation. I strive to bridge basic and clinical research, aligning my work closely with the mission of the DBM.

What role does our institute and its proximity to the hospital play for your scientific aims?

The proximity of the DBM to the hospital, particularly to the Institute of Pathology where I also work in routine diagnostics, is a key enabling factor for our research. Being just across the street from the ZLF and the hospital allows us to seamlessly connect clinical practice and molecular analyses of fresh patient tissues and materials. This unique setup facilitates integrated translational research, and this is essential for my research that goes from bench to bedside and vice versa. Clinical tissue samples are the foundation of our infectious disease research, and our scientific results aim at improving diagnostic approaches. Close proximity of clinicians, bench scientists and data scientists is a key ingredient to create scientific innovation that benefits patients. I am really excited to strengthen the bridges between clinical and basic science at the DBM.

Could you tell us something about your team?
Have you managed to establish your own lab yet?

I have already started mentoring some incredibly talented residents and students, and I work with a postdoc. Their fresh perspectives and energy are making a positive impact on our projects. Currently, I am looking forward to expanding our team and diving deeper into our research in the coming months, and I am still in the process of hiring new members. The scientific reputation of the DBM has helped me attract some great candidates, and the DBM staff is enormously helpful in supporting me during the candidate selection process.

" Bridging clinical insights with molecular research transforms our understanding of infections and opens new approaches for patient care."

Fun fact/interesting fact about you that people would not know from your resumé:

I enjoy running and walking in nature, and for the past few years, I have been overseeing the renovation of our old house with its overgrown garden. Running helps me to change my perspective, and renovating has taught me the merits of long-term planning and perseverance. So you see: I like some challenges outside the lab.

Cover Story

Andreas Keller
Architect of Memory

Andreas Keller

Andreas Keller was born in Basel, Switzerland. He studied physics at ETH Zurich where he also completed his PhD. He then moved to San Francisco to do a postdoc at UCSF. His work has received several awards, including the Eppendorf & Science Prize for Neurobiology (2021 Finalist). Among others, his seminal work about visual processing paved the way for further developments in the field. He lives in Birsfelden and enjoys life!

How was your start at the DBM ?

It is an honor to join the Department of Biomedicine as the successor to Prof. Bernhard Bettler. The legacy of great science conducted within these walls is both inspiring and humbling. Our lab's start at the DBM has been remarkably smooth, thanks to the incredible support we've received.
We're particularly grateful to the existing DBM staff who have been instrumental in our transition. The administrative assistants, HR professionals, and coordinators have all provided invaluable assistance, making us feel welcome and helping us navigate our new environment with ease.
We've been impressed by the state-of-the-art facilities and the interdisciplinary approach to research here. The collaborative atmosphere and warm reception from colleagues have been truly encouraging.

Can you provide us with a brief overview of your research, how it fits into the DBM, your vision for the next five to ten years and the specific niche or specialization you aim to establish?

Our research aims to understand the mechanisms enabling cortical restructuring through experience and learning while maintaining normal brain function. We explore how distinct neural pathways reorganize during learning and investigate the role of global brain states in this process. A key focus is examining potential asymmetries in the plasticity of feedforward circuits, which provide environmental input, and feedback circuits, which deliver experience-based contextual signals. We are particularly interested in how this plasticity is modulated by global brain states and distinct neuromodulatory tones. Our findings will inform the development of novel, targeted interventions that mimic naturally-occurring neuromodulatory sequences to enhance plasticity. Our work complements other DBM laboratories' research on developmental neuroscience, regeneration and recovery therapy. By integrating these diverse approaches, we aim to uncover fundamental principles of brain plasticity. In conclusion, this research will provide insights into how neuronal circuits are restructured and may lay the foundation for treatment strategies that enhance plasticity in targeted cellular circuits.

What role does our institute and its proximity to the hospital play for your scientific aims?

Our institute's proximity to the hospital plays a crucial role in advancing our scientific aims. As a basic research group, we focus on developing strategies for targeted interventions that enhance neuroplasticity. This work has important implications not only for understanding the healthy nervous system but also for addressing diseases and impairments. Our research on plasticity mechanisms has the potential to inform translational and clinical work at DBM, particularly in areas related to neurological disorders and rehabilitation. The close connection between the DBM and its clinical partners provides an invaluable opportunity to bridge the gap between basic neuroscience and clinical applications. While our work remains focused on fundamental mechanisms, the insights we gain could potentially inspire new therapeutic approaches or contribute to the development of novel interventions for neurological conditions, leveraging the translational research strengths of the DBM ecosystem.

Cover Story

Andreas Keller
Architect of Memory

Could you tell us something about your team? Did you manage to establish up your own lab already?

Our team is a vibrant mix of researchers from diverse origins, all united by their passion for neuroscience. We're thrilled to have established our lab at the heart of Basel's life sciences campus. The stimulating environment has energized everyone, fostering creativity and collaboration. We're excited about the potential breakthroughs that lie ahead in this dynamic setting.

" The more we learn, the more we live in a dream world. Upon learning of a sensory task, our experience becomes more internally driven, blurring the line between objective reality and our subjective interpretation."

Fun fact/interesting fact about you that people would not know from your resumé:

Fun Fact: I once had an unexpected encounter with rural life that left a lasting impression – and a temporary limp. While exploring the countryside, I managed to slip on a patch of cow manure, resulting in a broken leg. It's a story that always gets a laugh and reminds me to watch my step!

Personal Success Story
From Classroom Curiosity to Cutting-Edge Research

by Martina Konantz

We will also once again delve into a personal journey of one of our recently graduated PhD students, discussing his motivation to become a scientist, elaborating the reasons behind his decision to join the DBM and providing insights into where his journey continues: Simon Garaudé, who recently completed his PhD in the Jeker Lab, and, together with one of his colleagues, won this year's DBM Research Prize, will share his inspiring story.

Simon Garaudé, Jeker Lab

Simon began his academic journey at the University of Lorraine (Nancy, France), where he earned a BSc in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology and completed a research internship focused on *in silico* molecular dynamics of protein-DNA interactions. He then moved to Paris, where he pursued an MSc in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at the Sorbonne University, specializing in structural and functional proteomics. For his Master's thesis, he moved to Switzerland and conducted research at the ETH Zurich, focusing on the structural biology of protein-RNA interactions. In 2020, he joined the Jeker Lab at the DBM to pursue a PhD in gene editing for protein engineering and graduated in July 2024.

What inspired you to become a scientist?

My interest in science was sparked unexpectedly during my last year of primary school. Our teacher introduced science debates in class, which sparked my curiosity in a way I hadn't experienced before. I found myself drawn to the idea that solutions to complex problems are often within reach, just waiting to be uncovered. It felt like standing in front of a locked door with a keychain full of jumbled keys—the right one is there, but it requires patience and persistence to find it. This analogy has stayed with me throughout my scientific journey.

While my high school science experience differed from primary school, it provided a valuable foundation of knowledge. It was a period of significant personal growth, even if the science programs didn't fully resonate with my curiosity. However, when I started university, everything changed. I discovered what felt like a true calling. The realization that people could make a career out of asking questions and seeking answers was eye-opening. It was as if I had found a community of crafty and like-minded individuals who were paid to be curious; like a glitch to make a living out of playing your favorite game.

What was your motivation to join the DBM?

During my Master's thesis, I had the opportunity to work on protein-RNA interactions, coinciding with the 2020 Nobel Prize in Chemistry awarded to Charpentier and Doudna for their work on CRISPR gene editing–a protein-RNA based technology. This breakthrough in molecular engineering made it clear to me that such technologies would become integral to the future of science and medicine. At the time, I felt my expertise was becoming heavily focused on biochemistry, gradually distancing me from patient-centered applications and needs. Joining the Jeker Lab at the DBM, which was increasingly utilizing similar gene editing tools to pursue a very elegant idea, seemed like the perfect opportunity to add a more translational, patient-oriented dimension to my profile.

Personal Success Story
From Classroom Curiosity to Cutting-Edge Research

by Martina Konantz

Could you summarize in a few words what you did in the paper that received the DBM Research Prize?

My initial objective was to generate a CD45 surface variant that could disrupt antibody binding while maintaining the receptor's stability and function using a genome editing technology known as base editing (BE). However, due to inherent limitations of base editors (BEs), such as the need for specifically recognized DNA motifs and the inability to induce certain amino acid substitutions, I faced challenges in introducing predefined mutations. I therefore conducted a comprehensive screening using various BEs and single guide RNAs (sgRNAs) targeting the entire extracellular domain of CD45. This approach allowed me to identify promising sgRNAs-to-BEs combinations that significantly reduced or eliminated antibody binding. I further optimized the base editing of CD45 variant candidates in T cells and hematopoietic stem and progenitor cells (HSPCs) by utilizing an evolved Cas9 protein. Our leading CD45 variant, K352E/G, abolished the binding of the tested antibody and therefore protected mutant HSPCs from anti-CD45 antibody-drug conjugate (ADC) cytotoxicity *in vitro* and later *in vivo*, while simultaneously eradicating CD45-positive blood cancer cells (*in vivo* experiments were conducted in collaboration with my colleague, Romina Marone).

What did you like the most during your time as a PhD at the DBM?

When I joined the DBM, I brought with me a foundation of skills and knowledge that has since evolved and expanded significantly. This growth has been driven not only by the demands of the project but, more importantly, by the highly collaborative environment at the DBM. Close exchanges with fellow researchers working on entirely different projects have opened up new possibilities and allowed me to explore ideas that were unfamiliar to me when I first started.

Personal Success Story
From Classroom Curiosity to Cutting-Edge Research

by Martina Konantz

What has been your greatest achievement in your young career?

I take pride in my willingness to explore unfamiliar fields, even when it means starting from scratch. As a biochemist by training, delving into immunology, cell culture, and *in vivo* studies during my PhD felt like beginning anew. I knew this journey would be both humbling and immensely enriching. While some may argue that venturing into new areas diminishes your expertise, I believe that expanding your knowledge enhances your ability to bridge disciplines, ultimately optimizing communication and collaboration across fields.

What are you doing right now and what are your plans for the future?

While my long-term goal is to remain very technology-driven and to develop tools that can be applied across multiple fields, I feel the need to further expand my knowledge in oncology so that I can more effectively contribute to the fight against cancers, particularly solid tumors. After focusing primarily on treatment applications for hemato-oncology during my PhD, I'm excited to join the Gentner Lab at the University Hospital of Lausanne's AGORA Cancer Research Center for an academic post-doc in September 2024. Additionally, I'm exploring the possibility of bringing some of my ideas to life in a startup setting, though this will require further consideration and development.

Do you have any advice for young students on how to become successful?

It might not be entirely appropriate for me to offer advice on becoming "successful", as I don't consider myself anywhere near that level. However, if I were to share a couple of thoughts, I would suggest to always letting your curiosity guide you and never settling for the easy way out. Many things in life are fleeting, but finding daily challenges and fulfillment in your work is something truly invaluable.

What is an interesting fact about you that is not on your CV?

I am part of a music band in which I compose songs. Over time, I've noticed some interesting parallels between music composition and scientific research. Both require creativity, attention to detail, and a willingness to explore and refine ideas. While I'm certainly no expert in either field, I've found that my musical experiences sometimes inspire "out of the box" thinking patterns that are applicable to a scientific setting.

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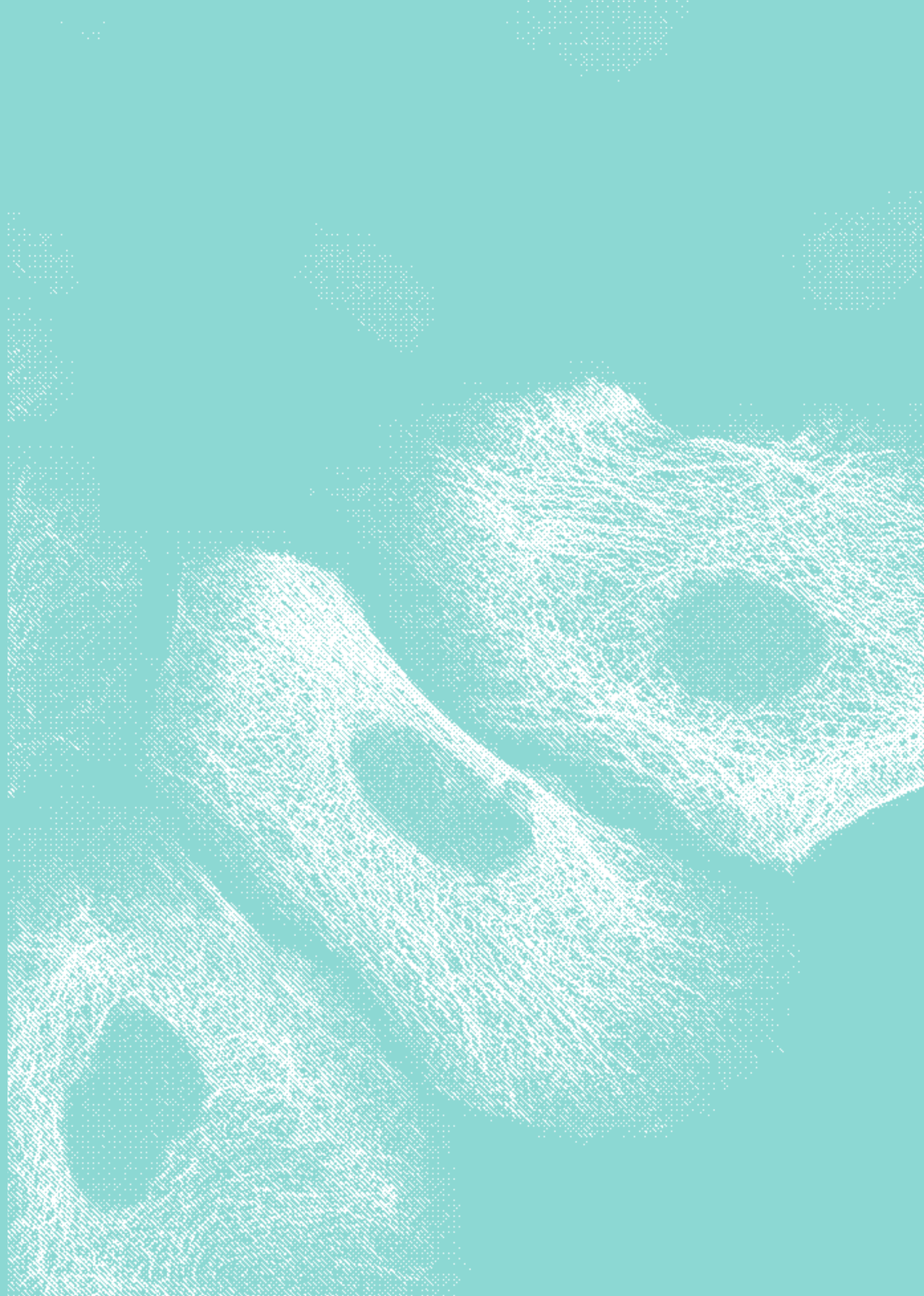

Portrait SAB Member
Publications

Interview with our Scientific Advisory Board Member

Judith Allen

Judith Allen is Professor of Immunobiology at the University of Manchester and a member of the Scientific Advisory Board at the Department of Biomedicine since 2020.

What inspired you to become a scientist?

I probably pursued science in order to not compete with my siblings, who excelled in history and language, etc. There were no scientists in my family, so as a young teen, it was a way to be different. However, by the time I started choosing courses as an undergraduate, I was captivated by the science itself.

What is your area of expertise?

My initial interests were in tropical diseases because I grew up in countries where they were endemic, and I was considering a career in public health. However, as I started my PhD, I became increasingly captivated by immunology and the host response to infection. I found that I really love the complexity of immunology. My lab for many years has focussed on immune response to helminths, which has led to a fascination with type 2 immunity – the response we generate against large multicellular parasites. Because these parasites are tissue damaging, I became increasingly interested in tissue repair pathways, and now the lab has a focus in understanding how the immune system regulates the extracellular matrix.

When and why did you agree to join the Scientific Advisory Board?

I was invited to join the board in mid-2019, with my term starting in January 2020. I was asked to replace Gitta Stockinger, who is an amazing immunologists, so it felt like a major honor. I briefly discusssed it with Gitta, and she assured me it was a rewarding experience, so I readily agreed.

What changes and developments have you noticed at DBM in recent years?

The changes I've seen at the DBM are very similar to those accross many institutions, as we all become more aware of the importance of creating a positive working environment and recognize the value of increasing diversity and ensuring the workplace meets the needs of different individuals. This was a particularly significant challenge for the DBM during the pandemic when so many of the clinical investigators had to turn their energies to COVID-19, leaving little time to pursue and develop their primay research interests.

What do you consider the strengths of the DBM?

There are many strenghts, from the excellent core facilities available to everyone to the strong links between the clinic and basic science. From my perspective on the advisory board, I am most impressed by the flexibility and willingness to respond to criticism. I have served on many SABs, and this one is the most responsive. Each year, our suggestions are taken very seriously and are often implemented. I see this as the most important role of the advisory board: to bring our knowledge of best practice (or poor practices) from other organisations and encourage the DBM to improve. We can also advise on strategic goals and provide practical guidance to young investigators – that is the fun part of the job.

A personal touch:

My interest in infectious disease arose from growing up in the Middle East. I was born in Egypt and raised in Egypt and Lebanon, moving to the U.S. at 18 to attend college. My parents were missionaries, and although I have chosen a very different path, a large part of what drives me is a sense of service. This is why being a biomedical scientist is so ideal - I get to fullfill my passion for scientific discovery while feeling that what I do has societal benefit.

Interview with our Scientific Advisory Board Member
Bernard Malissen

Bernard Malissen is founder and director of the Centre for Immunophenomics and team leader at the Centre d'Immunologie de Marseille Luminy (CIML). He is a member of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Department of Biomedicine since 2018.

What inspired you to become a scientist?

When I was eight, I had the opportunity to observe the metamorphosis of *Saturnia pavonia*, one of the most beautiful European moths. This fascinating experience led me to question what life is and how it works. I was also interested in human evolution and spent my vacations participating in archeological excavations in the southwest of France. However, in contrast to archeology, biology is an experimental science, and at the end, this convinced me to become a biologist. In biology, you form a hypothesis about a biological process, set up an experiment, and ultimately find out whether you were right or wrong.

What is your area of expertise?

I had the opportunity to start my PhD at the Centre d'Immunologie de Marseille-Luminy (CIML) in France in 1977, during the 'immunology wave'—a tremendously exciting time for adaptive immunology that started with the discovery of MHC restriction and the generation of immunoglobulin diversity via somatic site-specific recombination. I developed a strong interest for T cells. After succeeding cloning and expanding functional T cells, I spent a couple of years at the California Institute of Technology, learning molecular biology in the laboratory of Leroy Hood. I then started a team at CIML, where we developed some synthetic biology approaches 'avant-la-lettre' to reconstruct *de novo* the multimolecular machines that enable T lymphocytes to specifically recognize antigens. Later, my team's interests extended to include dendritic cells and macrophages, an area of research in which we were among the first to dissect the functional complexity of dendritic cells found in tissue parenchyma. In an attempt to disentangle the tremendous complexity of the signaling networks involved in T cell activation under normal and pathological conditions, we currently combine the power of mouse genetics with quantitative interactomics.

When and why did you agree to join the Scientific Advisory Board?

I joined the SAB in 2018 after being approached by Radek Skoda, the head of the DBM department at the time, with a request to contribute to the evaluation of research groups working on immunological topics. Many laboratories in Basel including those at the DBM, have a long-standing tradition in immunological research and enjoy a high national and international reputation. I was curious to learn more about the work being done at the DBM. Since then, it has been a pleasure to visit the DBM each January and advise the different teams as much as possible.

What changes and developments have you noticed at DBM in recent years?

The change in directorship, often a challenging time for many large institutions, has been smoothly managed at DBM, ensuring superb continuity in the operation of key scientific platforms, administrative services, and the PhD student program. I am convinced that bringing all the DBM laboratories and platforms together in a new building will undoubtedly boost DBM research and enhance the potential for developing integrative approaches.

What do you consider the strengths of the DBM?

I have been very impressed by the level of integration of fundamental and translational research achieved at DBM. This integration allows for the use of cutting-edge technical approaches to a wide range of biological processes and their dysfunctions in humans.

In your opinion, what is the most important role of an advisory board?

Based on my experience on several boards, the primary role of an advisory board is to promote the best science. This includes providing pragmatic, rather than theoretical, advice to the Director, senior scientists, and junior researchers, as well as offering guidance on general issues such as platforms and student programs.

Interview with our Scientific Advisory Board Member
Bernard Malissen

Can you tell us an interesting fact about yourself that people wouldn't know from your resume?

A few thoughts instead of 'an interesting fact': For public policies focused on profitability and societal impact, it might seem logical to prioritize research with clear medical applications, which could, given budgetary constraints, lead to a reduction in fundamental studies. But let me take the example of monoclonal antibodies. It was only 20 years after their discovery that they made a major breakthrough in the arsenal used to treat certain cancers. When in the mid-1970s, MILSTEIN and KOHLER invented this technique, they were trying to answer a fundamental question that interested only a small fraction of immunologists and did not file any patents. This suggests the value of funding passionate and rigorous researchers and allowing them the freedom to pursue solitary research quests, which in fact becomes more and more difficult to incorporate in the administrative complexities we face. Finally, allow me to wish passionate young researchers the experience of these rare moments when a scientific question, posed in a manner necessarily inaudible to the autonomous space of the world, is nevertheless „heard". These rare moments correspond to the fact that our imagination manages to bring to light a tiny fragment of the pre-existing order of living things and helps restore it when it is afflicted by pathologies.

Publications

All publications we have received from the period between May and August 2024. The publications are listed by date.

Management of Patients with Hypersensitivity to Platinum Salts and Taxane in Gynecological Cancers: A Cross-Sectional Study by the European Network of Young Gynaecologic Oncologists (ENYGO)

Zwimpfer TA, Bilir E, Gasimli K, Cokan A, Bizzarri N, Razumova Z, Kacperczyk-Bartnik J, Nikolova T, Pletnev A, Kahramanoglu I, Shushkevich A, Strojna A, Theofanakis C, Cicakova T, Vetter M, Montavon C, Morgan G, Heinzelmann-Schwarz V.

Cancers (Basel). 2024 Mar 14;16(6):1155.
doi: 10.3390/cancers16061155.

Preassembly of specific Gβγ subunits at GABAB receptors through auxiliary KCTD proteins accelerates channel gating

Fritzius T, Tureček R, Fernandez-Fernandez D, Isogai S, Rem PD, Kralikova M, Gassmann M, Bettler B.

Biochem Pharmacol. 2024 Mar 28:116176.
doi: 10.1016/j.bcp.2024.116176. Online ahead of print.

Synaptotagmin-11 facilitates assembly of a presynaptic signaling complex in post-Golgi cargo vesicles

Trovò L, Kouvaros S, Schwenk J, Fernandez-Fernandez D, Fritzius T, Rem PD, Früh S, Gassmann M, Fakler B, Bischofberger J, Bettler B.

EMBO Rep. 2024 Jun;25(6):2610-2634.
doi: 10.1038/s44319-024-00147-0. Epub 2024 May 2.

Inhibition of the transmembrane transporter ABCB1 overcomes resistance to doxorubicin in patient-derived organoid models of HCC

Blukacz L, Nuciforo S, Fucile G, Trulsson F, Duthaler U, Wieland ST, Heim M H.

Hepatol Commun. 2024 May 2;8(5):e0437.
doi: 10.1097/HC9.0000000000000437. eCollection 2024 May 1.

CaMKIIβ deregulation contributes to neuromuscular junction destabilization in Myotonic Dystrophy type I

Falcetta D, Quirim S, Cocchiararo I, Chabry F, Théodore M, Stiefvater A, Lin S, Tintignac L, Ivanek R, Kinter J, Rüegg MA, Sinnreich M, Castets P.

Skelet Muscle. 2024 May 21;14(1):11.
doi: 10.1186/s13395-024-00345-3.

TBX3 is essential for establishment of the posterior boundary of anterior genes and upregulation of posterior genes together with HAND2 during the onset of limb bud development

Soussi G, Girdziusaite A, Jhanwar S, Palacio V, Notaro M, Sheth R, Zeller R, Zuniga A.

Development. 2024 Jun 1;151(11):dev202722.
doi: 10.1242/dev.202722. Epub 2024 Jun 3.

Engineered phalangeal grafts for children with symbrachydactyly: A proof of concept

Schaller R, Moya A, Zhang G, Chaaban M, Paillaud R, Bartoszek EM, Schaefer DJ, Martin I, Kaempfen A, Scherberich A.

J Tissue Eng. 2024 Jun 12:15:20417314241257352.
doi: 10.1177/20417314241257352. eCollection 2024 Jan-Dec.

Trifluridine/Tipiracil Based Chemoradiation in locally Advanced Rectal Cancer: The Phase I/II TARC Trial

Thiele B, Stein A, Schultheiß C, Paschold L, Jonas H, Goekkurt E, Rüssel J, Schuch G, Wierecky J, Sinn M, Tintelnot J, Petersen C, Rothkamm K, Vettorazzi E, Binder M.

Clin Colorectal Cancer. 2024 Jun 22:S1533-0028(24)00059-8.
doi: 10.1016/j.clcc.2024.06.003. Online ahead of print.

Publications

Engineered human osteoarthritic cartilage organoids

Dönges L, Damle A, Mainardi A, Bock T, Schönenberger M, Martin I, Barbero A.

Biomaterials. 2024 Jul:308:122549.
doi: 10.1016/j.biomaterials.2024.122549. Epub 2024 Mar 22.

Detection of disease-specific signatures in B cell repertoires of lymphomas using machine learning

Schmidt-Barbo P, Kalweit G, Naouar M, Paschold L, Willscher E, Schultheiß C, Märkl B, Dirnhofer S, Tzankov A, Binder M, Kalweit M.

PLoS Comput Biol. 2024 Jul 2;20(7):e1011570.
doi: 10.1371/journal.pcbi.1011570. eCollection 2024 Jul.

Monoallelic de novo AJAP1 loss-of-function variants disrupt trans-synaptic control of neurotransmitter release

Früh S, Boudkkazi S, Koppensteiner P, Sereikaite V, Chen LY, Fernandez-Fernandez D, Rem PD, Ulrich D, Schwenk J, Chen Z, Le Monnier E, Fritzius T, Innocenti SM, Besseyrias V, Trovò L, Stawarski M, Argilli E, Sherr EH, van Bon B, Kamsteeg EJ, Iascone M, Pilotta A, Cutrì MR, Azamian MS, Hernández-García H, Lalani SR, Rosenfeld JA, Zhao X, Vogel TP, Ona H, Scott AD, Scheiffele P, Strømgaard K, Tafti M, Gassmann M, Fakler B, Shigemoto R, Bettler B.

Sci Adv. 2024 Jul 12;10(28):eadk5462.
doi: 10.1126/sciadv.adk5462. Epub 2024 Jul 10.

Factor H-related protein 1 in systemic lupus erythematosus

Kleer JS, Klehr J, Dubler D, Infanti L, Chizzolini C, Huynh-Do U, Ribi C, Trendelenburg M.

Front Immunol. 2024 Jul 29:15:1447991. doi: 10.3389/fimmu.2024.1447991. eCollection 2024.

B cells expressing mutated IGHV1-69-encoded antigen receptors related to virus neutralization show lymphoma-like transcriptomes in patients with chronic HCV infection

Schultheiß C, Willscher E, Paschold L, Ackermann C, Escher M, Scholz R, Knapp M, Lützkendorf J, Müller LP, Schulze Zur Wiesch J, Binder M.

Hepatol Commun. 2024 Jul 31;8(8):e0503.
doi: 10.1097/HC9.0000000000000503. eCollection 2024 Aug 1.

Engineered autologous nasal cartilage for repair of nasal septal perforations - a case series

Kaiser B, Miot S, Wixmerten A, Pullig O, Eyrich M, Fulco I, Vavrina J, Schaefer DJ, Martin I, Barbero A, Haug M.

Int J Surg. 2024 Aug 5.
doi: 10.1097/JS9.0000000000001843. Online ahead of print.

Polygenic susceptibility for multiple sclerosis is associated with working memory in low-performing young adults

Petrovska J, Coynel D, Freytag V, de Quervain DJF, Papassotiropoulos A.

J Neurol Sci. 2024 Jul 15:463:123138.
doi: 10.1016/j.jns.2024.123138. Online ahead of print.

Semaphorin 3A promotes the long-term persistence of human SVF-derived microvascular networks in engineered grafts

Schwager JM, Di Maggio N, Grosso A, Rasadurai A, Minder N, Hubbell JA, Kappos EA, Schaefer DJ, Briquez PS, Banfi A and Burger MG

Front. Bioeng. Biotechnol. 12: 1396450 (2024)
doi: 10.3389/fbioe.2024.1396450.

Publications

A20 haploinsufficiency disturbs immune homeostasis and drives the transformation of lymphocytes with permissive antigen receptors

Schultheiß C, Paschold L, Mohebiany AN, Escher M, Kattimani YM, Müller M, Schmidt-Barbo P, Mensa-Vilaró A, Aróstegui JI, Boursier G, de Moreuil C, Hautala T, Willscher E, Jonas H, Chinchuluun N, Grosser B, Märkl B, Klapper W, Oommen PT, Gössling K, Hoffmann K, Tiegs G, Czernilofsky F, Dietrich S, Freeman A, Schwartz DM, Waisman A, Aksentijevich I, Binder M.

Sci Adv. 2024 Aug 23;10(34):eadl3975.
doi: 10.1126/sciadv.adl3975. Epub 2024 Aug 21.

Stem cell memory EBV-specific T cells control EBV tumor growth and persist in vivo

Palianina D, Mietz J, Stühler C, Arnold B, Bantug G, Münz C, Chijioke O, Khanna N.

Sci Adv. 2024 Aug 23;10(34):eado2048.
doi: 10.1126/sciadv.ado2048. Epub 2024 Aug 23.

T cell receptor architecture and clonal tiding provide insight into the transformation trajectory of peripheral T cell lymphomas

Willscher E, Schultheiß C, Paschold L, Schümann FL, Schmidt-Barbo P, Thiele B, Bauer M, Wickenhauser C, Weber T, Binder M.

Haematologica. 2024 Aug 29.
doi: 10.3324/haematol.2024.285395. Online ahead of print.

Circovirus hepatitis in an immunocompromised patient, Switzerland

Hamelin B, Pérot P, Pichler I, Haslbauer JD, Hardy D, Hing D, Louliz S, Regnault B, Pieters A, Heijnen I, Berkemeier C, Mancuso M, Kufner V, Willi N, Jamet A, Dheilly N, Eloit M, Recher M, Huber M, Mertz KD.

Emerg Infect Dis. 2024 Oct.
doi: 10.3201/eid3010.240678. Online ahead of print.

In addition, we would like to highlight a notable publication from the past few months: a comprehensive review on the management of BK polyomavirus in kidney transplantation. This important work provides valuable guidance for clinicians and researchers alike.

The second international consensus guidelines on the management of BK polyomavirus in kidney transplantation

Kotton CN, Kamar N, Wojciechowski D, Eder M, Hopfer H, Randhawa P, Sester M, Comoli P, Tedesco Silva H, Knoll G, Brennan DC, Trofe-Clark J, Pape L, Axelrod D, Kiberd B, Wong G, Hirsch HH.

Transplantation. 2024 Sept 108(9):p 1834-1866
doi: 10.1097/TP.0000000000004976

As a reminder, to ensure that our newsletter represents the impactful research conducted at the DBM, we have established the following criteria for including publications:

1. Authorship: At least one of the first authors, last authors, or corresponding authors must be a member of the DBM.
2. Affiliation: The Department of Biomedicine affiliation must be clearly stated in the author list as published by the journal.
3. Availability: The final version of the article must be available. Online pre-publications will be included once their DOI in a peer-reviewed journal is available.

Our primary focus is on original research publications that advance our understanding of biomedical science. Review articles and guidelines are generally not considered, unless they appeared in top journals of broad readership beyond specific specialties (e.g. Cell, Science, Nature, NEJM, etc.).

We encourage all members to keep us informed of their latest publications so we can continue to celebrate and share the outstanding research conducted at the DBM.

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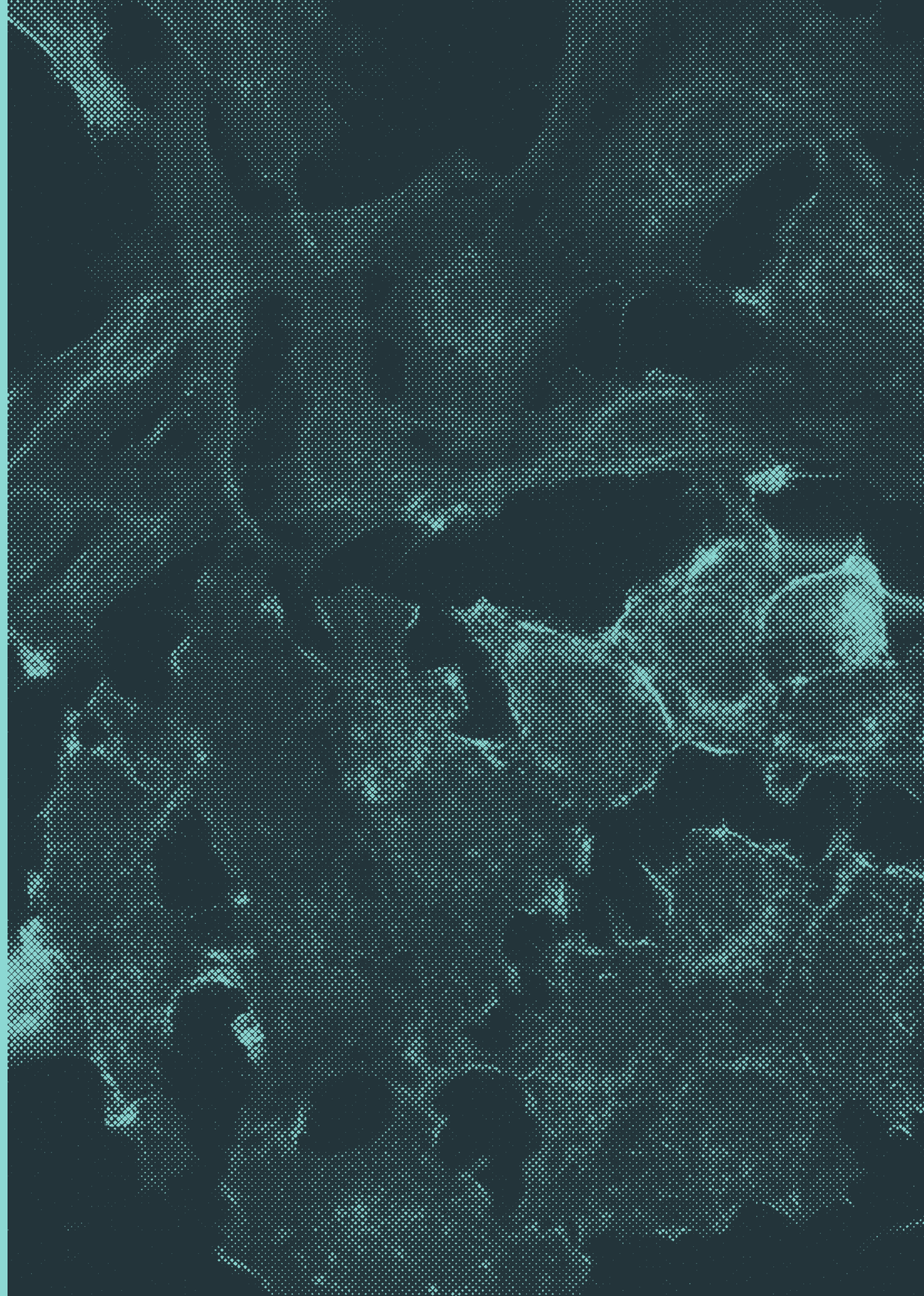
Congratulations
Events



The DBM Congratulates

Awards since May 2024

We extend our heartfelt congratulations to the following DBM members for their remarkable awards and achievements since May 2024.

Congratulations to **Nora Wetzel** for receiving a SNF Mobility Grant under the Starting Grant: "MicroBe: Towards Harnessing Microbiota-B Cell Interaction for Immunomodulation in Neuroinflammation."

Alina Makeeva for obtaining an outstanding poster presentation award in "Targeting the JAK/STAT pathway with JAK2-selective inhibitors, but not JAK1-selective or JAK1/2 inhibitors, reduces proliferation and induces apoptosis in human neoplastic mast cells at the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI) Hybrid Congress."

Maurizio Cortada on his 1st lecture award at the SGORL annual spring meeting: "Understanding Inner Ear Biology as a Pathway to Novel Hearing Loss Therapeutics."

Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Oto-Rhino-Laryngologie (SGORL) https://www.orl-hno.ch/bildung-und-e-learning/preise/vortragspreis

Anna Sophia Beetschen and Timo Schenker for receiving the Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences (SAMW)-funded new 2024 MD-PhD Grants: "Molecular mechanisms of persistent Staphylococcus aureus bacteremia" and "Chimeric antigen receptor microglia for glioblastoma immunotherapy."

Basil Wicki on his Rising Star and Win-Jung Koh Award at the World Bronchiectasis Conference in Dundee 2024. https://www.world-bronchiectasis-conference.org/2024/?page_id=2743

Christine Blume and science journalist **Ilka Eliana Knigge** have been awarded this year's prize for science communication and science journalism by the German Psychological Society (DGPs) for their podcast "Über Schlafen."

Simon Garaudé and Romina Matter Marone on their DBM Prize for their publication "Selective haematological cancer eradication with preserved haematopoiesis." https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38778101/.

Patrick Lipps on obtaining a second-place thesis award in 2024 from Young Clinical Neuroscientists (YouClin).

The DBM Congratulates

Petya Apostolova on her bilateral collaborative research grant by the European Haematology Association.

The grant was awarded to Petya Apostolova and **Simon Mendez-Ferrer** for collaboration on a project entitled "The role of cholinergic signalling on immune cell metabolism, acute graft-versus-host disease pathogenesis, and graft-versus-tumour effect."

Heinz Läubli on his Research Prize of the Basel Cancer League. He was honored for his work on resistance mechanisms to cancer immunotherapy. His research has led to significant advances in the field. It offers new hope for patients undergoing this form of cancer treatment.

Magdalena Filipowicz Sinnreich for receiving the Stern-Gattiker Prize 2024 by the Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences (SAMS). https://www.samw.ch/de/Aktuelles/Medienmitteilungen.html

Lukas Jeker for receiving a Jonas Memorial Award at the Jonas Centre Cellular Therapy Symposium: https://www.jonascentersymposium.com/home

Rolf Zeller on being elected as a Founding Member of the European Molecular Biology Laboratories Bioethics Board (EEB).

The DBM Congratulates

PhD Defenses since May 2024

03.05.24	Cell Biology	Grozdan Cvijetic
21.05.24	Cell Biology	Sofia Benucci
24.05.24	Medical-Biological Research	Manivannan Madhuri
05.06.24	Medical-Biological Research	Elsa Görsch
21.06.24	Medical-Biological Research	Sebastian Holdermann
25.06.24	Medical-Biological Research	Sofia Tundo
28.06.24	Medical-Biological Research	Matias Ciancaglini
01.07.24	Microbiology	Frederick Kodzo Bright
10.07.24	Cell Biology	Simon Garaudé
15.07.24	Genetics	Victorio Palacio
16.07.24	Genetics	Geoffrey Soussi
30.07.24	Medical-Biological Research	Joyce de Paula Souza
20.08.24	Medical-Biological Research	Lena Keller
30.08.24	Molecular Biology	Laila Kulsvehagen
04.09.24	Medical-Biological Research	Tomás Martins

DBM Basel

Farewell to Gennaro De Libero

We would like to express our heartfelt appreciation to Prof. Dr. Gennaro De Libero for his time and dedication at the DBM. You have been an important part of the team. We wish you a retirement full of joy, relaxation and satisfaction!

Summer Symposium

Here's to another successful Summer Symposium! A day of scientific exchange that brought together our community of researchers and students. We had an inspiring keynote lecture by Barbara Treutlein and a special presentation by Romina Matter & Simon Garaudé, the winners of this year's DBM Research Prize.

DBM Basel

DBM Barbecue

The Summer BBQ at Kraftwerkinsel is an annual gathering that celebrates everyone who works at the DBM. With its relaxed atmosphere, it was a great hub for colleagues from different groups to get to know each other and connect. Furthermore, the event was filled with delicious food and drink, unlimited ice cream, and fun activities like a photo booth and a DJ.

Upcoming Events

Athena's Journey - Prof. Mascha Binder

09.10.2024

Explore the Lab

Mohamed Bentires-Alj
Viola Heinzelmann and Francis Jacob
Clémentine Le Magnen

16.10.2024

DBM Master Project - Pitch & Pizza Lunch

18.10.2024

DBM Research Day 2025

23.01.2025

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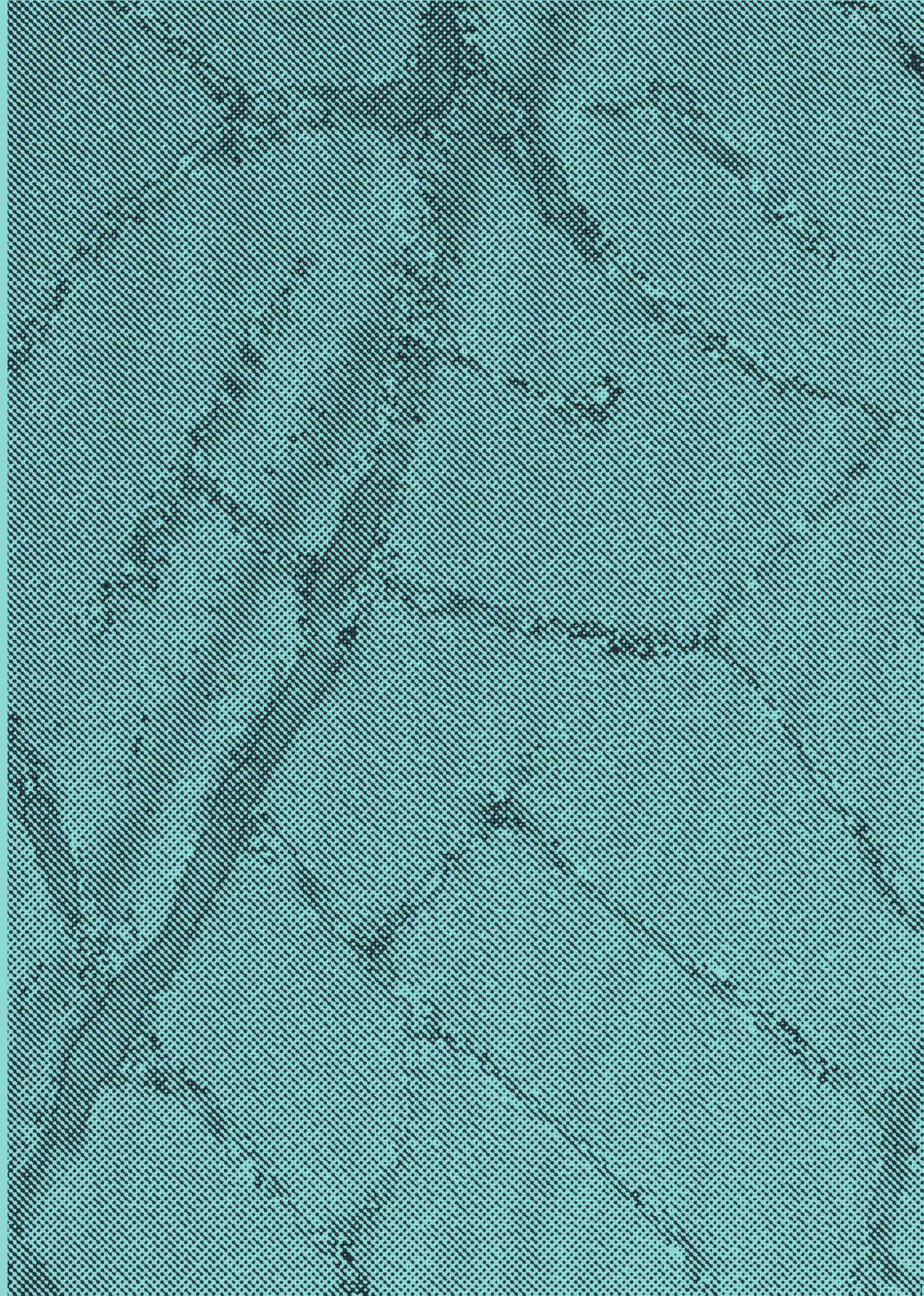
Basel
Department of
Biomedicine



New Colleagues

New Colleagues from May to September 2024

We are delighted to have you among us. We would like to express our warmest welcome and good wishes!

Abbas Maryam
Alshoubaki Yasmin
Arndt Louisa
Bauersachs Hanke Gwendolyn
Baumann Lucy
Behera Leafy
Berest Ivan
Berna Pascual David
Berve Kristina
Bohnen Lara
Bonifacio Luca
Bressan Jana
Bühler Elena Melanie
Cadalbert Leo Andrin
Cela Rodriguez Carmela
Cervenka Igor
Chiem Manhnhi
Christ Delia Lluisa
Czech Marie
Darafeyeu Valiantsin
Daubigney Clara
Debatin Teres
De Vaan Joëlle
Do Sacramento Valentin
Forster Benjamin
Frech Amy-Kim
Fröhlich Jane Olivia
Gasler Ioana Teodora
Goetzinger Felix
Gomez Fernandez Luna
Grubich Atac David
Gutzwiller Sophia
Han Xiao
Heuzeroth Frederick
Ianiri Teresa
Jermann Jasmin
Kang Juening
Kania Karolina
Kaufmann Jonas
Keller Andreas
Kessler Sandra
Khan Rameesa
Kiriyanthan Alexia
Kizil Cihat Burak
Kremer Amandine
Kunz Michael
Lambrecht Victoria
Lauder Lucas
Le Gall Morgan Camille
Le Gall Victor
Lerch Romane
Lhospice Emilien
Luzi Giacomo
Mahfoud Felix
Mancuso Maria Teresa
Meier Rahel
Mertz Kirsten Diana
Meyer Emmanuel
Mock Diana
Montella Elena
Moreo Lapieza Eduardo Javier
Mukundan Madan
Nadišauskaitė Rūta
Neff Sarah
Obermaier Benedikt
Oliviera de Mattos Cruz Philippe Caloba
Orleth Laura
O'Scannlain Aidan
Patel Anushka
Raach Yakine
Rauchhaus Jonas
Reisch Anna
Roig Merino Sara
Roth Morgane
Schmid Valentine
Spera Irene
Stec Irenäus
Stojanovska Frosina
Therre Markus
Thüringer Yannik
Trenta Federica
Tufilli Lowell
Verspecht Lore
Wasser Tobias
Zaugg Judith
Zeis Patrice
Zindel Selina
Zollet Valentina

Thank you!

The DBM newsletter team would like to thank all the contributors for their work. We hope you enjoyed reading the newsletter.

Please feel free to submit your ideas and input for our next issue.

communications-dbm@unibas.ch

Find us on Social Media:

Linkedin:
Department of Biomedicine

X:
@DepBiomedicine

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Contact:
Department of Biomedicine
Hebelstrasse 20
4031 Basel
Switzerland

Email: communications-dbm@unibas.ch

Universität Basel

Department of Biomedicine

DBM Basel

Newsletter
September 2024