

Science2Start award ceremony at the BioRegio STERN summer reception in Reutlingen

“Curiosity is something we all have in common.”

(Stuttgart/Reutlingen) – Last Thursday, the Science2Start award ceremony was held as part of the popular BioRegio STERN summer reception. This is an occasion for recognising ideas that scientists and start-up founders have come up with that have economic potential. First place went to “TWYCE” – a game changer in cancer immunotherapy for solid tumours. In second place was an idea for an innovative use of nanobodies in molecular imaging for companion diagnostics. The judging panel also gave out two third-place prizes, to “Apelvo”, a training system for pelvic floor muscles, and the “TuCAN – Tübingen Cognitive Assessment for Neuropsychiatric Disorders” app development. The numerous guests from the worlds of business, science and politics were delighted to meet in person again in the Reutlingen technology park after a two-year break due to the pandemic.

Last Thursday evening, the summer reception – a joint event organised together with the Verein zur Förderung der Biotechnologie und Medizintechnik e. V. and Tübingen-Reutlingen Technology Park (TTR) GmbH – was finally back, offering a great occasion to experience the huge network of BioRegio STERN Management GmbH, which recently marked its 20th anniversary. The new map of BioRegion STERN that was presented at the reception in Reutlingen also provided an impressive view of the lively life sciences scene. It includes over 400 profiles spread across categories including biotech, medtech, engineering and digital health/IT.

The Science2Start award ceremony formed part of this regional get-together for entrepreneurs, scientists, investors and politicians from the sector. This was the 13th time prizes had been awarded in recognition of promising life sciences ideas developed by scientists and start-ups from the region. The keynote speaker was to have been Prof. Thomas Gottwald, Member of the Supervisory Board and shareholder of Ovesco En-

doscopy AG. Unfortunately, he had to cancel at short notice. Luckily, Dr. Christian Lindemann from Voelker & Partner Rechtsanwälte Wirtschaftsprüfer Steuerberater mbB, a joint practice of lawyers, tax advisors and financial auditors that donated the prize money worth a total of 5,500 euros, was able to step in. “Curiosity is something we all have in common. These young entrepreneurs are here because at some point they were curious about something, and they still are,” Lindemann said of the prize winners. “As for me, I have the privilege of being able to share in that curiosity and discover now what the issues of the near and medium-term future will be. Day by day, that curiosity drives you to make progress in the field of human health. Is there anything better than that?”

After the keynote speech, the following four teams from BioRegion STERN received their awards.

1st place: “TWYCE – 2 target molecules on cancerous cells + 2 signals for T cells. A game changer in cancer immunotherapy for solid tumours”

Dr. Martin Pflügler, Prof. Gundram Jung and Prof. Helmut Salih from the translational immunology clinical cooperation unit based jointly at University Hospital Tübingen and the German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ) are developing a new treatment especially for solid tumours, where immunotherapy has so far generally been unsuccessful. The researchers are working on activating T cells, the most powerful cells in the immune system, to attack cancerous cells in a targeted way. The soon-to-be-founded company TWYCE will pursue a unique combined approach involving the use of two bispecific antibodies that interact functionally with each other. This will solve the current challenges of T-cell-based immunotherapy in terms of efficacy and reducing side effects. The first clinical evaluation of the new antibodies is set to take place in patients with prostate cancer and lung cancer.

2nd place: “Molecular imaging as companion diagnostics – nanobody-based precision radiotracer for ImmunoPET”

The team led by Teresa Wagner, Dr. Philipp Kaiser and Dr. Björn Tränkle from the Natural and Medical Science Institute (NMI) in Reutlingen is developing special nanobodies, also known as nanoantibodies, that target immune cell markers. These innovative detecting molecules can be used as tracers for positron emission tomography

(PET), an imaging procedure that involves patients being injected with a mildly radioactive substance (tracer). Nanobody-based tracers are capable of identifying immune cells in tumour tissue. This new procedure for tumour diagnostics makes it possible to customise cancer immunotherapy to the individual patient and thus boost the effectiveness of the treatment, while also reducing costs and side effects.

3rd place: “Apelvo”

Tübingen-based Fysor GmbH is developing Apelvo. This is a gamified training system for treating and preventing urinary and faecal incontinence, prolapse issues and other symptoms of neglected or damaged pelvic floor muscles in men, women and children. Apelvo uses electrodes on the skin to measure muscle activity in the pelvic floor and turns this information into control signals for exergames (fitness games) that can be played on conventional smartphones and tablets. As a result, patients train their pelvic floor muscles more frequently and on an ongoing basis, thereby improving their perception, coordination, stamina and strength with lasting effect.

3rd place: “TuCAN – Tübingen Cognitive Assessment for Neuropsychiatric Disorders”

TuCAN is being developed by a team led by Christian Mychajliw from the University Hospital for Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, Tübingen (Louisa Sting BSc., Kristina Dawidowsky MSc., Dr. Heiko Holz and Dr. Franz Wortha). The app enables a tablet to be used for a user-oriented, needs-based diagnostic procedure for neuropsychiatric conditions such as dementia, Parkinson’s and depression. The application contains established tasks for the patients and supplements the responses with additional recorded digital information, which is then to be analysed automatically and objectively using machine learning. As a result, TuCAN can help medical personnel, including specialists, with early differential diagnoses and provide a more efficient, more effective way of conducting and evaluating the neuropsychological diagnostic tests.

About BioRegio STERN Management GmbH:

BioRegio STERN Management GmbH promotes economic development in the life sciences industry, helping to strengthen the region as a business location by supporting innovations and start-up companies in the public interest. It is the main point of contact for company founders and entrepreneurs in the Stuttgart and Neckar-Alb regions, including the cities of Tübingen and Reutlingen.

The STERN BioRegion is one of the largest and most successful bioregions in Germany. Its unique selling points include a mix of biotech and medtech companies that is outstanding in Germany and regional clusters in the fields of automation technology and mechanical engineering.

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