

## Eighty years and none the quieter.

A little more than ten years ago, Prof. Urs A. Meyer became an emeritus. To retire, however, did not cross his mind. The active emeritus is involved in teaching, advises startups and travels the world giving lectures. But once a week he is just a grandfather.



Urs A. Meyer was Professor of Pharmacology at the Biozentrum from 1983 to 2008. He is best known for his research in the field of pharmacogenomics and personalized medicine. He investigated the influence of environmental and genetic factors on drug action. After his retirement, he served as President of the International Society for the Study of Xenobiotics. Currently, he is a scientific advisor for various biotech and pharma companies, Associate Editor of the Annual Review of Pharmacology and Toxicology and President of the Board of Directors at PharmaSens AG. He also gives lectures and is engaged in teaching activities.

Urs Meyer's office is located on the 8th floor of the Biozentrum, in the Emeritus Lounge. Along with shelves full of books and folders, a Meyer family tree also hangs on the wall with photos of his former group members including Prof. Radek Skoda, Head of the Department of Biomedicine, the emeritus Hans-Peter Hauri and Christoph Handschin, one of the active Biozentrum professors. Documents and papers are piled up on his desk. The computer is on and occasionally the phone rings. Comfortable retirement looks quite different.

Even at the age of eighty, Urs Meyer has lost none of his enthusiasm for work nor his apparently irrepressible energy. Therefore, the answer to the question of whether he can imagine retiring one day is actually clear. He simply has no time for this.

One of the next longer journeys will be to Stockholm. There Urs Meyer will give his award lecture at the annual congress of the EACPT – the European Association for Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics – at the presentation of the “EACPT Lifetime Achievement Award 2019”, which he received for his scientific lifetime achievements earlier this year. For him, it is a special honor: “This prize means a lot to me, because it is a recognition by colleagues, fellow scientists, who do research in the same field and know your work. I am already very much looking forward to meeting people and friends, who I have known for many years.” Urs Meyer still attends such scientific meetings three to four times a year. And he regularly holds lectures, including talks on topics from his former research field, pharmacological individuality, pharmacogenetics, personalized and precision medicine. Even though he no longer leads research projects, his expertise is still in demand worldwide.

Furthermore, he is still frequently asked for samples that are stored in the freezer here at the Biozentrum, as during his active research years Urs Meyer established a valuable collection of tissue biopsies and genetic probes for laboratory research. “When I'm here at the Biozentrum, usually on Wednesdays and Thursdays, I take care of these requests. Now and again, I attend lab meetings of my successor Christoph Hand-

schin and have discussions with his group members. That is what I miss the most as an emeritus, the contact with young people.”

Some of the young scientists reciprocate his visits and like to come to him to his office for career advice. They want to know what their opportunities are with a PhD in the pocket. Here, Urs Meyer can often help with his experience and his broad network. And perhaps also because he knows that success depends on achievement and perseverance but also on some good fortune and lucky chances.

His advisory competence is not only appreciated by young researchers ready to take the next career step. His second mainstay, for almost seventeen years now, is scientific consulting for startups. “Back then, three of my postdocs founded a company and asked if I would help them as a member of the Scientific Advisory Board, Urs Meyer also promoted the concept that start-ups from the Biozentrum could use inhouse laboratories and infrastructures for the initial period. One of these companies was MyoContract, now Santhera, the first start-up ever at the Biozentrum. Later, he was invited to provide scientific advice to one of the largest Swiss investment companies, HBM Healthcare Investments in Zug, investing in the global healthcare market. “I always found this work incredibly interesting and stimulating. I have assessed many companies with regard to their ideas, their potential and their risks, and have always learned a lot of new things”.

As an upcoming activity, Urs Meyer supports the newly founded Swiss Future Fund. The Future Fund was launched with the goal of promoting innovation, for example new disruptive technologies, in Switzerland. “In fact, billions of Swiss francs slumber in pension funds or other collective saving funds and are, presently, mostly unavailable for investment. This is because there are regulations to limit risky investments and because there is a lack of expertise and experience to professionally assess long-term private equity investments. Well-educated peo-

ple with innovative ideas are Switzerland’s most important capital. The Future Fund aims to financially support local young entrepreneurs in establishing their companies and accompany them through the process. We all recognize that future viability of the Swiss economy requires innovation.”

In addition to this activity, Urs Meyer is heavily involved in the company Pharmasens, which is working on the development of an insulin pump in view of an artificial pancreas for diabetic patients. Moreover, with his own consulting firm “PharmBiotech Consultancy”, Urs Meyer has currently three mandates. “I receive most requests via my network. Helping these companies with scientific and strategic advice is an important part of my life. But, of course, I have other jobs too. Among others, I am Associate Editor of ‘Annual Reviews of Pharmacology and Toxicology’. In

fact, next week I will travel to Vancouver, Canada, for the yearly Editorial Committee Meeting, where we will design the next issue”.

But that’s not all. Urs Meyer participates in teaching in master classes, summer schools and again in courses with medical students in Zurich and Basel. Twice a year he travels to China and helps Prof. Thomas Szucs and other lecturers there with the training for managers and study leaders in drug development sciences based on the successful Basel ECPM (European Course in Pharmaceutical Medicine) courses.

But on one day of the week Urs Meyer has private time for something that is very special to him. Together with his wife, he looks after their grandchildren in Vitznau. “Each Tuesday I am indispensable, I am then exclusively a grandfather.” ☒



The former Urs A. Meyer group members randomly arranged in the shape of a liver. A present to Urs Meyer on his 80th birthday.