



Press Release

September 7, 2015

Berlin-based hygiene expert Professor Petra Gastmeier receives the Robert Koch Award for Hospital Hygiene and Infection Prevention 2015

For her outstanding achievements in the surveillance of nosocomial infections, Professor Petra Gastmeier has been honoured with the “Award for Hospital Hygiene and Infection Prevention” from the Robert Koch Foundation in Berlin. After Professor Helge Karch (Münster), the Head of the Institute of Hygiene and Environmental Medicine at the Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin is the second laureate of the award, which was founded in 2013 and comes with a prize of 50,000 euros. “With the establishment of the KISS system for the surveillance of infections in German hospitals, the laureate and her team have played a significant role in improving hospital hygiene throughout Germany,” comments Hubertus Erlen, Chairman of the Board of Directors at the Robert Koch Foundation. The award was presented on Monday, September 7, 2015 in the grand ballroom at Berlin City Hall.

Professor Gastmeier’s tools of the trade are not scalpels, stethoscopes or medication. Instead, she takes action in fighting the spread of hospital-acquired infections using training measures and hygiene modules. Nosocomial infections are one of the most critical complications associated with medical treatments in Germany, and result in prolonged stays in hospital and higher costs in addition to the personal suffering of the patients. While exact figures are not available, an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 patients die annually as a result of an infection acquired at hospital. The recent outbreaks of *Acinetobacter baumannii* in German hospitals and cases of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) in Korea highlight how difficult it is to detect and prevent nosocomial infections.

Recording and monitoring nosocomial infections is an extremely effective tool for their prevention. Petra Gastmeier and her team at the German National Reference Center for Surveillance of Nosocomial Infections have developed a system used for the surveillance of infections in German hospitals – better known by its catchy abbreviated name KISS (Krankenhaus-Infektions-Surveillance-System) – and have made significant improvements in protecting patients from hospital-acquired infections. From 20 participating hospitals at the launch of the system in 1996, this number has now grown to over 1,400. The hospitals compare their own infection data with reference data and figures from comparable units in order to classify their own infection and hygiene standards and to introduce and evaluate preventative measures. The voluntary participation and confidentiality of the results are both fundamental principles of the KISS system.

Gastmeier has made the establishment of KISS, the scientific analysis of the data and the consistent implementation in medical practice her main objective. In contrast to other countries, additional surveillance modules have been developed for the KISS

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system used by Professor Gastmeier and her team. Of these, HAND-KISS for hand hygiene is the most commonly used and is found in more than 1,000 participating hospitals. The KISS modules are tailored to patient groups (e.g. NEO-KISS for premature babies), the range of treatments (e.g. OP-KISS for surgical units) or a specific pathogen (MRSA-KISS). Using these modules enables the participating units to identify shortcomings in hygiene standards and to rectify them accordingly. Comprehensive databases have also been established through the KISS system. These enable a scientific analysis of the epidemiology and pathogenesis of nosocomial infections to be made and the influence of various factors associated with patients and hospitals to be measured.

Of particular importance in hospital hygiene are pathogens that are resistant to antibiotics (such as staphylococci, acinetobacters and pseudomonads), which can only be treated to a limited extent when resistant against three or four of the available classes of antibiotics. Moreover, there is a high risk of these germs spreading within the hospital. There are two approaches towards preventing infections caused by multiresistant pathogens – consultation when prescribing antibiotics and compiling regulations (antibiotic stewardship) and preventing the pathogens from being transmitted by hospital staff and patients. Petra Gastmeier has made an outstanding contribution in these fields. One such example is the “Aktion saubere Hände” (Clean Hands Initiative), a campaign she has led since 2008 for improving hand disinfection in German healthcare facilities. The consumption of disinfectants is recorded at the 1,500 participating institutions – such as hospitals and care homes – and the use of disinfectants has been increased by up to 80% thanks to training measures.

Petra Gastmeier is also the laureate of the main award from the German Society for Hygiene and Microbiology (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Hygiene und Mikrobiologie, DGHM) and the Hygiene Prize at the Rudolf Schülke Foundation. She is member of the Commission for Hospital Hygiene and Infection Prevention and the Advisory Board for Infection Epidemiology/Public Health Microbiology at the Robert Koch Institute. Gastmeier and her colleagues have had over 300 scientific contributions published in renowned international journals. With all of these achievements, it is no surprise that she is known under the moniker “Miss Kiss” in hygiene circles – a very special kind of honorary title.

Information on the award

In Germany, approximately 500,000 patients contract hospital infections each year, more than 10,000 cases of which are fatal. These statistics indicate that advanced medicine has reached its limits. Improvements in the implementation of hospital hygiene and the development of new strategies in therapy and the prevention of nosocomial infections are urgently needed. This is why the Robert Koch Foundation introduced the Prize for Hospital Hygiene and Infection Prevention two years ago, with the aim of drawing attention to exemplary achievements in the field of hospital hygiene and infection prevention. It is intended to serve as an incentive to improve the standard of hygiene in our hospitals through new scientific and application-oriented projects.

The Prize is financially supported by B. Braun Melsungen AG.



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Note to editors:

Photos of the award ceremony can be found at:

http://www.robert-koch-stiftung.de/index.php?article_id=292&clang=1

Photo and CV of Petra Gastmeier can be found at

<http://www.robert-koch-stiftung.de/awardforhygiene2015>

About the Robert Koch Foundation

The Robert Koch Foundation is a non-profit foundation dedicated to the promotion of medical progress and is based in Berlin. It promotes basic scientific research in the field of infectious diseases, as well as exemplary projects that address medical and hygienic issues. Patron of the Foundation, which was founded in 1907, is German President Joachim Gauck.

The Foundation confers a number of distinguished scientific awards each year: the Robert Koch Award – one of Germany's most distinguished scientific awards, the Robert Koch Gold Medal, three awards for young scientists and, for the first time in 2013, the Hospital Hygiene and Infection Prevention Award.

Robert Koch (1843 – 1910), after whom the award is named, was the founder of modern-day bacteriology, for which he was awarded the 1905 Nobel Prize for Medicine and Physiology. From 1891 until his retirement in 1904, Koch was Head of the Institute for Infectious Diseases in Berlin.

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