

**Laudatory speech on the presentation of the Robert Koch
Hospital Hygiene and Infection Prevention Award
to Professor Dr. Petra Gastmeier**

**Prof. Dr. Jörg Hacker
Chairman of the Scientific Advisory Council of the
Robert Koch Foundation
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– Check against delivery –

Dear State Secretary,
Dear Mr Erlen,
Dear Mr Braun,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Infection researchers have known for generations that microorganisms know no boundaries. To this extent, successful measures to combat infection have always gone hand in hand with cross-border activities. Today, this principle applies in a particular way. Infection pathogens are being transported around the globe, and every year, the World Health Organization describes new pathogens which transmit disease in different ways. The cases of MERS which are occurring in a series of different countries are one example of this phenomenon. So-called “nosocomial” infection pathogens transmitted in hospitals are also spreading around the world, as is the case with certain strains of *Acinetobacter* or staphylococci. They are a contributing factor in the increase in cases of infection in hospitals.

The fight against infections contracted in hospitals must therefore be conducted at an international level. For this reason, it was appropriate that the G7 summit, which this year was held in Elmau in Germany, identified hospital infections and antibiotics and antibiotic resistances as being an important issue for debate. I am certain that after the state and government leaders of the G7 states have discussed this topic, international measures will be introduced accordingly. However, one precondition for activities to be successful on an international scale is always that data be gathered, evaluated and passed on within a national context. In Germany, a series of programmes, projects and measures is being implemented that fall into this category.

The antibiotics resistance strategy of the German federal government is just one of these coordinated measures, for example.

Infection pathogens contracted in hospitals, many of which are resistant against a series of antibiotics, or almost all antibiotics, must therefore be combated intensively. It is not easy to produce figures relating to this problem, but it is assumed that in Germany, 500,000 patients contract nosocomial infections in hospitals every year, of which between 10,000 and 30,000 are fatal. Something must therefore be done to move forward in this area and to reduce the number of infections. Every so often, outstanding researchers emerge who take the work forward on certain problem areas, in this case hospital infections. One of these individuals is Professor Petra Gastmeier from the Charité hospital in Berlin.

Professor Gastmeier is this year's recipient of the Robert Koch Foundation Hospital Hygiene and Infection Prevention Award. The award amount is 50,000 euros. What is the important contribution that Professor Gastmeier has made? She set up the "Hospital Infection Surveillance System (Krankenhaus-Infektions-Surveillance-System, or KISS)" and in so doing created an important tool with which to combat hospital infections at a national level and beyond. Together with the members of her team, Dr. C. Geffers, Dr. F. Schwab and Dr. M. Behnke, she established KISS on the basis of the German National Reference Centre for the Surveillance of Nosocomial Infections, which under her leadership became a highly influential institution. It is a model project, also internationally, which records and evaluates data on the occurrence of hospital infections.

In turn, this monitoring has consequences for the organisation and combating of hospital infections. In consequence, nosocomial infections are being prevented and the dissemination of antibiotic-resistant pathogens is being reduced, in particular in the area of intensive care for patients. In the interim, elements of this infection prevention have also been adopted into the German legislation, such as the Infection Protection Act.

Here, the campaign for hand hygiene compliance has emerged as being particularly influential. Many of us will surely have noticed the "Campaign for clean hands" initiative in hospitals. This campaign has led to a noticeable reduction in infections and to an improvement in infection prevention. Overall, the KISS prevention measures have been introduced by 1,500 institutions, including 800 hospitals.

Thanks to its modular structure, the KISS system is flexible, and the option is available of adding new fields. With this in mind, the KISS team is planning two new projects

which we also wish to support through the Hospital Hygiene Award. The “ONKO-KISS” module will focus in particular on cancer patients and the prevention of infections among this patient group. The “survey tool” is designed to improve structures and process quality.

I should also mention the international connections being fostered by Professor Gastmeier and her team. On the one hand, she is cooperating with the European Center for Disease Control and Prevention in Stockholm, where she is also feeding her data into European databases. It should also be noted that in the interim, alongside the US National Healthcare Safety Network (NHSN) programme, the KISS system is the largest surveillance programme for nosocomial infections worldwide. Indeed, there is also collaboration between KISS and this US network.

The work being conducted by KISS has been reported in 120 publications to date, many of which are also internationally renowned journals.

Professor Gastmeier was born in Potsdam. She studied medicine at the Martin Luther University in Halle (Saale) and at the Charité in Berlin. In 1985, she completed her doctoral thesis in Berlin with a paper on salmonella and wastewater treatment strategies. In 1988 she became a consultant physician for hygiene and environmental medicine, and habilitated in 1999 at the Free University in Berlin, with her work already focusing on nosocomial infections. In 2000, she accepted a C3 professorship at the Hanover Medical School, and in 2007 became a W3 professor for hygiene at the Institute of Hygiene and Environmental Medicine at the Charité, where she still works today.

Professor Gastmeier has initiated and implemented a series of projects. Alongside the “Campaign for clean hands” and KISS project mentioned above, mention should also be made here of numerous EU projects which again reflect the international scope of Professor Gastmeier’s work. Professor Gastmeier is also fulfilling an important role as leader of a sub-project in the “InfectControl 2020” project.

It goes without saying that Professor Gastmeier has already received numerous awards, such as the Humboldt University Robert Koch Dissertation Award in 1986, the main German Society for Hygiene and Microbiology award in 2003 and the Rudolf Schülke Foundation Hygiene Award in 2007. Professor Gastmeier is a member of a number of different committees such as the Commission for Hospital Hygiene and Infection Prevention at the Robert Koch Foundation, and is active at an international level within the framework of the European Congress of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ECCMID) and the WHO.

My heartfelt congratulations go to Professor Gastmeier and her team on being conferred with the Robert Koch Foundation Award for Hospital Hygiene and Infection Prevention, and wish her every success for the future, enjoyment in her work and a productive time ahead.

Thank you for your attention.