

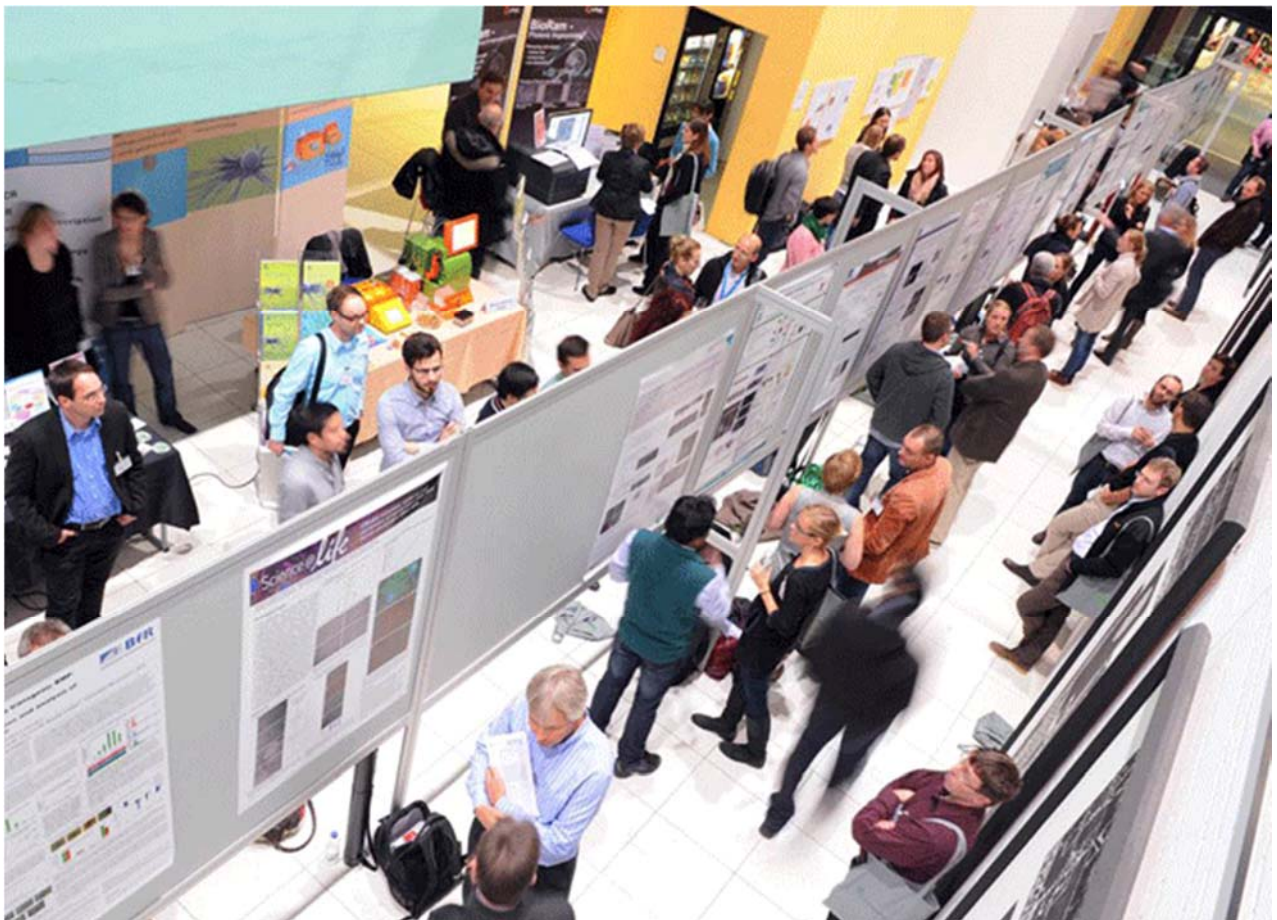
## Off to a great start: the MDC hosts the first annual conference of the German Stem Cell Network

Max Delbrück Center, 21.11.2013, Author: Maimona Id

With over 400 conference participants and 300 members so far, the GSCN has a strong launch.

Over the past few years, stem cell biology has extended into virtually every area of biology – from cancer research to the development of therapeutic substances – and holds particular promise in clinical research. The prerequisite for the development of therapies is excellent basic science, according to stem cell researcher Michele de Luca; this was a key theme in his opening lecture at the first annual conference of the German Stem Cell Network (GSCN), which took place at the MDC from Nov. 11-13.

Daniel Besser, coordinator of the GSCN, was excited about the community's enthusiastic response to the meeting. "We received over 400 registrations. And in the meantime the society has 300 members. Initially the network received 312,000 Euros to set up the central office, to establish working groups and organize this meeting, which we achieved in a surprisingly short time." The central office is located at the MDC. Another application is being made to support the network for the next three years.



Success for the first annual conference: 400 participants, 240 abstracts, of these 193 poster presentations, Photo: Steffen Weigelt, Copyright: GSCN/MDC

“With earlier networks established in other countries, a central task was to consolidate and establish stem cell research as a field,” said GSCN President Prof. Andreas Trumpp. “The current challenge is to achieve a solid footing in society and wide acceptance of the field.” He called the GSCN a “second-generation” network that will have a major focus on translation: building bridges between basic and clinical research, and establishing successful collaborations between a wide range of disciplines.

Working groups will play a central role in the operations of the GSCN. “They need to be autonomous and yet highly integrative to cover the field,” said Prof. Oliver Brüstle, past and founding president of the GSCN, at a press conference held at the end of the meeting. The themes of the working groups range from scientific areas to topics regarding the acceptance of stem cell research among the general public.

One of the working groups, for example, is devoted to patient-oriented public information; a goal is to provide high-quality information about established stem cell therapies while distinguishing them from risky or deceptive claims. “There have been cases of families selling everything they own so that they could afford an expensive stem cell therapy here in Germany that they needed for a family member,” said Brüstle, who is director of the Institute for Reconstructive Neurobiology at the University of Bonn. “They arrive and then find themselves standing in front of a clinic that has closed down, because it worked with methods that had not been approved.”

Alongside a stronger public information program to deal with ethical questions in the field, the GSCN will place a particular focus on helping pupils and teachers stay up to date with stem cell research. “We have a service goal: to prepare teaching materials and prepare the next generation for the issues that will arise,” said Dr. Tobias Cantz. As head of the working group for Translational Hepatology and Stem Cell Biology, within the REBIRTH Cluster of Excellence, Cantz is a member of the extended directorate of the GSCN; he is highly interested in arousing interest in the field among pupils at an early age. Over the long term that will be a key step, he said, in improving the quality of German stem cell research.

More information on the GSCN and the Conference can be found at:  
<http://www.gscn.org/en/HOME.aspx>