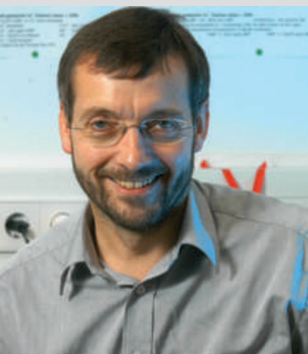


MOVERS

**Walter Rosenthal, scientific director,
Max Delbrück Center for Molecular Medicine,
Berlin, Germany**



1996–2008: Director, Leibniz Institute for Molecular Pharmacology, Berlin, Germany

1993–96: Chairman, Rudolf Buchheim Institute for Pharmacology, Giessen, Germany

1991–93: Heisenberg fellow and visiting professor, Department of Cell Biology, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, Texas

Many scientists know their career leanings from an early age. Walter Rosenthal did not. Then, at the age of 19, while driving an ambulance for the German Red Cross, he discovered his vocation in medicine.

Rosenthal is amazed by how far his interest in medicine and pharmacology has taken him. As the new scientific director of the Max Delbrück Center (MDC) for Molecular Medicine in Berlin, he will follow his translational-research mantra: turn basic science into clinical solutions.

While studying medicine at the Justus Liebig University in Giessen, Rosenthal assumed he would become a general practitioner. "I didn't know research was an option when I first started my education," he says. His chats with pharmacologists introduced him to the demanding, open discussions inherent to research. He went on to develop assays to detect cellular signalling molecules as part of a research thesis.

A postdoc spent primarily at the Free University of Berlin would prove crucial. Working with pharmacologist Günter Schultz, Rosenthal began isolating and characterizing G proteins, a large family of cell-surface signalling proteins. "I was lucky to enter the field of G proteins when it was exploding with opportunities," he says.

Rosenthal returned to his medical roots when Mariel Birnbaumer, a colleague at Baylor University in Houston, Texas, invited him to help clone a receptor implicated in diabetes insipidus. Later he identified gene mutations in patients with a congenital form of the disease. Molecular medicine has been Rosenthal's career pursuit ever since.

Although he had just established a lab at the University of Giessen, Rosenthal couldn't resist an invitation to lead the Institute for Molecular Pharmacology (FMP) in Berlin. "I was attracted to the FMP by the idea of having pharmacologists, structural biologists, chemists and molecular geneticists all under one roof," he says.

But first he had to move the former East German institute to its current location near the MDC in Berlin-Buch. Detlev Ganten, former chief executive of Berlin's Charité hospital, says Rosenthal had the academic standing, demeanour and stature to overcome the political and infrastructure hurdles.

Rosenthal plans to expand the MDC's study of systems biology and forge translational-research collaborations in cardiovascular disease. "There is no recipe to best connect excellent basic research with clinical medicine," he says. "But we have to improve it somehow." ■

Virginia Gewin

BRICKS & MORTAR

New centres plan for healthy ageing

Competition is heating up for researchers in the rapidly growing field of ageing research. Some two dozen faculty-level scientists and postdocs are being recruited by new or expanding US institutes.

"Ageing is hot because it covers almost every aspect of biology and underlies most major human diseases," says Andrew Dillin, director of the new Center for Aging Research at the Salk Institute in La Jolla, California.

Funded by a \$5-million grant from the Glenn Foundation for Medical Research in Carpinteria, California, the centre will support up to three new research groups. It will build on the Salk Institute's research strengths in metabolism, stem-cell biology, ageing of dividing cells and ageing of organisms. The centre is recruiting seven or eight postdocs to work on a joint project in two labs. The funding will also accommodate two or three visiting scholars each year. Staying for three to six months, they will build collaborative research projects involving multiple labs, and organize a symposium on a topic of their choice.

Collaborations may extend beyond the Salk campus. Although the details aren't finalized, Salk biologist Fred Gage says there is potential for synergy with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and

Harvard University, two other Glenn funding recipients. MIT's Glenn Laboratory for the Science of Aging — which focuses on ageing regulators, such as proteins known as sirtuins that allow cells to survive damage and delay death — is recruiting four postdocs. The \$5-million Glenn gift received last autumn will fund its work on mouse models of ageing and ageing diseases, including Alzheimer's, cancer, osteoporosis and metabolic diseases.

The Buck Institute for Age Research in Novato, California, is seeking a faculty-level stem-cell researcher now and will soon fill 12 more faculty posts at a \$41-million research facility, half-funded by the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine. Scheduled to open in 2010, it will provide more dedicated space for stem-cell biology, an area with potential to diagnose and treat age-related disease. "Ageing is one of the frontiers of science and we've created an institute that sits at the interface between ageing and age-related disease research," says biologist Gordon Lithgow.

"One of the overarching questions is what constitutes healthy ageing," says Gage. "We want to learn how to optimize the process because, unlike a disease, ageing isn't going away." ■

Virginia Gewin

POSTDOC JOURNAL

It takes a lab to raise a child

My return to work has been smoother than I expected. Why the ease of re-entry? In my first month back I worked flexible hours, many from home. Working half-days in the lab really made these big changes easy for baby and mum, as we built our new schedule in increments rather than all at once. Also, everyone at work has been extremely baby-friendly.

When I needed to pop into the lab to throw samples in the water bath or prep tomorrow's experiment, there was always a colleague happy to play peek-a-boo. I even took my son to a local conference. Most importantly, I credit the patience and support of my stellar supervisor and lab mates, and my partner, who is taking six months' paternity leave so I can return to full-time work.

Why my hurry back to the bench when I could have taken a full year of leave? As might be expected, even six months of down-time has reduced the potential number of manuscripts that I'll have in print this year. In addition to the usual pressure to publish, we, like so many other labs, have major grant deadlines looming. These have no time or tolerance for babies, no matter how cute.

The honeymoon period is certainly over. The next month will be packed with lab work and data analysis. There will be no extra rest for the wickedly sleep-deprived. ■

Julia Boughner is a postdoc in evolutionary developmental biology at the University of Calgary, Canada.