

Early career investigator highlight—January

Kristina Nadine Heye¹



Early career investigator highlight: biocommentary Kristina Nadine Heye

After growing up in small village near Zurich in Switzerland, I went to medical school at the University of Zurich. As part of my studies, I spent one semester at the French-speaking University of Lausanne, before graduating in 2013. Eager to learn about medicine far away from the industrialized world, I volunteered at the St. Francis Hospital in Ifakara, Tanzania, and was greatly rewarded with diverse experiences in tropical health care. Back in Switzerland, I joined the Research Group Heart and Brain at the University Children's Hospital Zurich (Co PI's Walter Knirsch and Beatrice Latal), parallel to commencing my clinical training, and currently work there as a pediatric resident and research fellow.

Anticipation and sustainability are values, which I cherish most in the versatile field of pediatrics. My admiration for children, their astonishing resilience and adaptability substantially contributed to my decision to become a pediatrician.

Since my first exposure to clinical research, I have been thrilled by the field of neurocardiology. Back then, I was working on my doctoral thesis on Takotsubo cardiomyopathy, an acute heart syndrome with possible neurovegetative etiology. This fascination led me to pursue a conjoint scientific and clinical career, where I greatly appreciate the interdisciplinary and multiprofessional collaborations in the quest for improved patient care. Meeting the Research Group Heart and Brain at the University Children's Hospital Zurich was a life-changing moment. Being inspired and motivated by the team, under the supervision of Beatrice Latal, Ruth O'Gorman, Bettina Reich, and Walter Knirsch, I gained energy and passion for the ever-continuing search for answers. My research focuses on brain growth and neurodevelopmental outcome in children with congenital heart disease, a growing high-risk population in the era of ever-improving survival. I am particularly interested in the pathophysiology causing altered brain development in children with congenital heart disease and its significance on neurocognitive functioning and social integrity, in the course of the children's lifetime.

The vibrant research world taught me patience, persistence, and to continuously grow my curiosity on questions that might never be answered. Still at the very beginning of my research career, my advice would be to look for great teachers fostering your enthusiasm, and extraordinary places, where ideas may become innovation. Above all, embrace challenges, as they become inspirations of exceptional value.

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