

In Memoriam of Professor Hans Wolf

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It is with profound sadness that we document this memorial tribute to the honorable Professor Hans Joachim Wolf, an eminent scholar in virology and recipient of the Chinese Government's Friendship Award, who passed away in 2024.

Throughout his distinguished scientific career, Prof. Wolf made seminal contributions to molecular virology, tumor virus research, and HIV/AIDS studies, while fostering international research and public health collaborations. His groundbreaking achievements include providing the first evidence of small RNA-mediated gene expression regulation in viral systems and identifying the parotid gland as the site of Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) persistence and EBV-induced cell fusion — findings that established the biological basis for nasopharyngeal carcinoma (NPC) formation. He also pioneered the early development of computational programs for predicting antigenic regions of viral proteins, particularly human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) proteins, which significantly advanced HIV vaccine development efforts.

Hans Wolf was born in 1945 in Kronach, Bavaria, Germany. He completed his graduate studies in Chemistry and Biology in 1970 and earned his Doctorate in Philosophy from the Julius-Maximilians-University of Wurzburg in 1974. His postdoctoral training from 1974 to 1977 was conducted under the mentorship of Prof. H. zur Hausen at the Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuernberg and Prof. B. Roizman at the University of Chicago. After obtaining his MD degree from the Medical Faculty of the University of Munich in 1980, he served as a lecturer in medical microbiology at the same institution. In 1981, he was appointed professor of molecular and tumor virology at the Max von Pettenkofer-Institut of the University of Munich. Prof. Wolf's career reached new heights in 1991 when he became the founding director of the Institute of Microbiology and Hygiene at the University of Regensburg, later serving as Dean of the Medical Faculty in 2001. In recognition of his expertise, he was appointed head of the WHO collaborating center for research and control of virus-associated cancer in 1992.

Beyond his research accomplishments, Prof. Wolf dedicated himself to translating scientific findings into public health benefits, particularly for developing nations. He conducted numerous EBV training courses in China and Malaysia to enhance local viral diagnostic capabilities and strengthen human resource capacity. His long-term research partnership with Prof. Yi Zeng of the Chinese Academy of Preventive Medicine (CAPM) focused on field studies and laboratory investigations of EBV and NPC. Through Prof. Wolf's diagnostic expertise, Prof. Zeng's team successfully developed an early NPC intervention strategy using EBV serological testing to identify individuals with viral reactivation who were at elevated risk for NPC. This screening approach enabled early-stage NPC diagnosis through nasopharyngoscopy and biopsy in EBV-positive patients. The collaboration between Prof. Wolf and Prof. Zeng's team also led to one of China's earliest EBV vaccine phase I clinical trials.

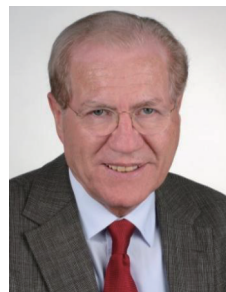
Prof. Wolf also maintained close collaborations with Prof. Yi Zeng and Prof. Yiming Shao on HIV/AIDS research at the CAPM and the China CDC, which was established in 2002 from CAPM. Their collaborative research evolved from early HIV diagnostic technique development to advanced HIV vaccine research. As a pioneer in the European Union's developing country collaborative program (INCO project) initiated in 1997, Prof. Wolf, together with Prof. Shao and other European and Chinese colleagues, successfully secured and implemented three European HIV vaccine projects (INCO I, II, and III from 1997 to 2005). These projects encompassed comprehensive HIV vaccine research, including vaccine design, development, preclinical studies, and phase I clinical trials in China.

As one of the first foreign scientists to collaborate with Chinese colleagues following China's reform and opening-up policy, Professor Wolf made over 40 visits to China, delivering numerous scientific lectures and technical workshops across more than half of the 31 PLADs in Chinese mainland, reaching thousands of Chinese professionals and students. He facilitated the academic development of more than 30 Chinese scientists, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows

through research opportunities at his laboratory and institute in Germany. Professor Wolf's commitment to sharing knowledge and advanced techniques with Chinese colleagues, without seeking compensation, exemplified his dedication to scientific advancement. His contributions extended beyond academic assistance, demonstrating genuine care and friendship toward the Chinese people, earning profound gratitude from the Chinese scholars he mentored. In recognition of his outstanding contributions to China's modernization and reform initiatives, Prof. Wolf was honored with The Friendship Award — the highest distinction bestowed upon foreign experts — by the Chinese Central Government at the Great Hall of the People, Beijing, in 2004.

The field of tumor virus and HIV research has lost an international luminary with the passing of Professor Wolf. His departure fills us with profound sorrow, and we remember him not only as an exceptional virologist but also as a warmhearted friend who touched countless lives through his work and mentorship.

As eloquently expressed by Prof. Hongbing Shen, China CDC Director General, in his condolence letter:



Professor Hans Wolf

“Prof. Wolf will be deeply missed by his Chinese colleagues and we believe that our partnership between China CDC and the University of Regensburg will be continued and strengthened.”

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