



Editorial

Public Health Microbiology: Recent developments under Robert Koch's genius loci



Dear Colleagues.

This special issue of the International Journal of Medical Microbiology is dedicated to an esteemed colleague, who will retire in 2024. As his coworkers, companions and friends we want to express our deepest gratitude and highest respect to Prof. Martin Mielke to whom we sadly bid farewell, as he retires from his position as Head of the Department for Infectious Diseases after 25 years of excellent and fruitful service to Germany's public health and beyond.

Martin Mielke refers to himself as a person who would probably prefer an exigent conversation over a roaring party. This makes him a timid recipient of an encomium, but special occasions call for stamina and endurance so here we go: Martin Mielke is a medical doctor and was trained by such eminent mentors as Helmut Hahn, Meta Alexander and Theobald Dissmann. His thirst for knowledge was kindled when, as a young doctor, he witnessed a new and unforeseen disease, AIDS. It was during this time that he was struck with the life-long and deeply-rooted interest in the complex battle between invading pathogens and the defending immune system. Martin Mielke spent research internships with Ralph van Furth at Leyden University and Siamon Gordon at the Sir William Dunn School for Pathology in Oxford. After his return, he became a Professor at the Institute for Medical Microbiology and Immunology of Infections at the Free University Berlin.

In 1999, he took up the position as Head of the Division for Hospital Hygiene, Infection Prevention and Control at the Robert Koch-Institute in Berlin. Through his efforts in the field of microbiology of nosocomial infections, Prof. Mielke has not only strongly supported the work of the Commission for Hospital Hygiene and Infection Prevention (KRINKO) but also achieved tangible improvements in public health outcomes in Germany by developing recommendations and guidelines.

In 2011, he became the Head of the Department for Infectious Diseases. Taking over more responsibility and enjoying the occasional creative leeway of this position has allowed him to shape the landscape of Public Health Microbiology especially with his unwavering support for the German Reference Centers and Consultant Laboratories. During

his tenure at RKI he had to deal with manifold threats to public health, e.g. Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis, the outbreak of H1N1, EHEC/HUS infection caused by contaminated food products, and last but not least, the SARS-CoV2 pandemic. In dealing with each of these situations, he impressed on all of us the necessity for cool reflection in the face of high pressure and time constraints. Typically, he asked himself and us: "Are we taking the right steps and are we fulfilling our tasks properly?"

Martin Mielke's personality is characterized by a clear and reliable canon of values and absolute integrity. He cultivates traits such as conscientiousness and reliability. His universal and integrated perspective has never endorsed hasty decisions and makeshift solutions and misprizes double structures and diffusion of responsibility. Despite all his willingness to cooperate, Martin Mielke has always spoken his mind and stood his ground when he was not convinced of the chosen approach.

Martin Mielke is a man of culture and eloquence and not many employees in public health microbiology and natural science can boast having a supervisor who is able to read Vesalius and Galen in the original. He smiles whimsically when he cites his favorite quote from the work of one of his predecessors, the renowned Carl Flügge:

"Wahrlich eine Fülle von Problemen, die den arbeitsfreudigen Hygieniker zu dem Ausruf veranlassen darf: Es ist eine Lust zu leben und sich in wissenschaftlicher Forschung auf dem Gebiet der Hygiene und der Infektionsprävention zu betätigen!"

"It is truly a wealth of problems that can lead the hard-working hygienist to the joyful exclamation: It is a pleasure to live and engage in scientific research in the field of hygiene and infection prevention!"

Dear Prof. Mielke,

Your colleagues are sad to see you parting and wish to thank you for your knowledge, your strength and your creativity that you have freely given during your time at the RKI. We are sure that your interests will still circle around the mysteries of infection and its prevention and we hope, that when you lean back and reflect upon your life as a medical doctor, a defender of public health, as a renowned scientist, and an inspiring leader, a quote from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe will come to your mind. At least the following words come to our mind, when we visualize this scene....

"Das schönste Glück des denkenden Menschen ist, das Erforschliche erforscht zu haben und das Unerforschliche ruhig zu verehren".

"The greatest happiness of a thinking person is to have explored the explorable and to quietly worship the unexplorable."

With heartfelt thanks and best wishes from

Annette Mankertz on behalf of the colleagues from the Department "Infectious Diseases" and Lars Schaade, President of RKI.

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