

PRESS RELEASE

Immunology in the spotlight - science discovers the short film

The European Federation of Immunological Societies (EFIS) explores new communication channels

Berlin, 27 April 2009.

The European Federation of Immunological Societies (EFIS) aims to bring immunology into the center of a general social discourse. While scientific reports often use a very complex and technical language and convey a lot of information, short films function as entertaining “hooks” in order to spark interest. The short film competition initiated by EFIS “Short Cuts for Immunology“ was intended to reach an audience without any scientific or immunological background. On 27 April 2009, the winning contribution “The Immunology Knight“ by the Italian director Luca Sabbioni was introduced to the public at the “Deutsche Kinemathek” in Berlin. The Award was endowed with 3.000 € - and the entire production costs were sponsored by EFIS.

Immunology is a topic of global relevance. Facing the threat of global pandemics such as the pig flu, the importance of immunological research becomes obvious. At the premiere celebration, that was organized in combination with the fifth Day of Immunology (see also www.dayofimmunology.org), EFIS President Prof. Stefan Kaufman moderated an open discussion with the communication scientist Dr. Markus Lehmkuhl (FU Berlin) and Frank Brendel (promotional film artist).

Survival depends on a functioning immune system. Flu, allergies, rheumatism, AIDS, tuberculosis or cancer result from imbalances in our immune system, which normally protects us against infection. Immunological research has resulted in the development of powerful vaccines that successfully eliminated some deadly threats of the last century, such as measles, tetanus and polio, to name a few. HIV, tuberculosis and cancer on the other hand are examples for the challenges which science is facing today.

“If everything is working as it should, nobody is even noticing the immune system. But as soon as a new infection emerges, like lately the pig flu, the immune system is in the news“, Professor Stefan Kaufmann opened the discussion.

EFIS has started their endeavors some years ago to inform the public as broadly as possible about the area of immunology, and kept exploring new ways of communication. Frank Brendel, well-known in the area of commercials, is convinced that a broad interest in scientific topics does in fact exist. Dr. Markus Lehmkuhl, communication scientist and science journalist, stated that “due to the information logistics and the public expectations, representation of complex facts is

frequently limited. The most important factors in science communication are a clear cut message, success stories and the use of the entire range of communication measures, in order to keep the attention“.

All three discussion participants concluded that short films can be a meaningful addition to regular science communication.

Winning contribution “The Immunology Knight” by Luca Sabbioni

The film can be interpreted in multiple ways and is highly memorable due to an unusual combination of different genres. On the one hand, in comic-like pictures, the immune system is metaphorically represented: An “Immunology Knight“ - a superhero that could represent the immune system - saves a woman from a violent attack. On the other hand, the movie conveys the message that even the hero is vulnerable to disease.

Producer Luca Sabbioni

Luca Sabbioni was born 1978 in Cantù, Italy. The trained cameraman worked already for numerous renowned film and TV production companies. Apart from his freelance activity as a short film director, the 29 year-old is teaching at the “Scuola di Cinema e Televisione e Nuovi Media“ in Milan, Italy. “The Immunology Knight“ is the sixth short film produced by Sabbioni.