



## Press Release

# Florian Grebien appointed as new Principal Investigator at St. Anna Children's Cancer Research Institute

(Vienna, 30.5.2023) **Prof. Florian Grebien, PhD, is eager to understand why some childhood leukemias show poor treatment response and how this can be tackled. To this end, he is now establishing his own team at St. Anna Children's Cancer Research Institute (St. Anna CCRI). "Prof. Grebien is an outstanding researcher. We have followed his scientific achievements for many years and are very pleased to have been able to recruit him as a Principal Investigator to St. Anna CCRI," says Prof. Kaan Boztug, MD, Scientific Director of St. Anna CCRI.**

Florian Grebien is the head of the Institute of Medical Biochemistry at the University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna, where he will continue to be active in research and teaching. Previously, he led a group at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Cancer Research (LBI-CR) in Vienna and had received one of the highly prestigious Starting Grants of the European Research Council (ERC) to study how blood cancers develop and progress using cutting edge technologies. Florian Grebien published his findings in renowned journals such as *Blood*, *Nature Structural & Molecular Biology* and *Genome Biology*.

### Exploiting nature's experiments

"St. Anna CCRI is the ideal place for my research ambitions, because it covers the topics that interest me most," says Florian Grebien. Specifically, his goal is to find new therapeutic targets for acute leukemias in children. He is investigating so-called fusion proteins, which result from chromosomes that are incorrectly reassembled after breakage. "Such 'misguided experiments' of nature often have devastating consequences, because some of these fusion proteins trigger cancer." Some fusion proteins have been known for a long time, but for many it is still unclear whether, and if so, how they cause malignancies. "There is a lot of potential for therapeutic intervention because fusion proteins can be attractive targets for new therapies. They do not occur in normal cells. So if you can find a way to turn them off, you can target cancer very specifically."

### Improving treatment for leukemia

In his new role, Florian Grebien aims to work on pressing questions related to the treatment of pediatric leukemias to improve the chances of survival for children. "The close proximity to physicians was an important motivation for me to join St. Anna Children's Cancer Research Institute." In addition he wants to assume a bridging function to the University of Veterinary Medicine and take advantage of potential synergies between the two institutions. Kaan Boztug points out: "I am very happy that we were able to win Florian Grebien – a scientist who has been rewarded repeatedly – for our institute. I am sure that his research will open up new perspectives for the institute and for the clinical application of new findings, thus actively supporting the mission of St. Anna CCRI."

In his laboratory, Florian Grebien tries to specifically alter genes or proteins in experimental leukemia models to then test how that affects disease establishment and progression. "In the process, we often find many potential candidates. The challenge is to bet on the right horse, that is, to pursue the relevant changes. It is possible to make the wrong decision and lose a lot of time." Florian Grebien has already identified targets for potential new therapies in the past, which resulted in clinical treatment of individual patients. "In the future, I hope that our research will identify more therapeutic options and thereby will improve the chances for children with leukemia."

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### About Prof. Florian Grebien, PhD

Florian Grebien obtained his PhD from the Medical University Vienna under joint supervision of Ernst Müllner (Medical University Vienna) and Prof. Hartmut Beug (Research Institute for Molecular Pathology) in 2007. During his PhD studies, he investigated the role of signaling pathways on erythrocyte differentiation. For his post-doctoral



training he joined the team of Prof. Giulio Superti-Furga, PhD, at the Research Center for Molecular Medicine (CeMM) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna. Using a combination of cell biology, protein biochemistry, and chemical biology, he identified molecular mechanisms that underlie oncoprotein-driven leukemia. From 2014 to 2018, Florian was a Principal Investigator and group leader at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Cancer Research (LBI-CR) in Vienna, supported by an ERC Starting Grant. In January 2018, he was appointed Professor and head of the institute for Medical Biochemistry at the University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna. Florian joined the CCRI in February 2023 as a Principal Investigator. His research focuses on molecular mechanisms of oncoprotein-driven leukemia. <https://ccri.at/research-group/grebien-group/>

#### **Photo**

Prof. Florian Grebien, PhD

Credit: St. Anna Children's Cancer Research Institute

#### **About St. Anna Children's Cancer Research Institute, St. Anna CCRI**

St. Anna CCRI is an internationally renowned multidisciplinary research institution with the aim to develop and optimize diagnostic, prognostic, and therapeutic strategies for the treatment of children and adolescents with cancer. To achieve this goal, it combines basic research with translational and clinical research and focus on the specific characteristics of childhood tumor diseases in order to provide young patients with the best possible and most innovative therapies. Dedicated research groups in the fields of tumor genomics and epigenomics, immunology, molecular biology, cell biology, bioinformatics and clinical research are working together to harmonize scientific findings with the clinical needs of physicians to ultimately improve the wellbeing of our patients.

[www.ccri.at](http://www.ccri.at) [www.kinderkrebsforschung.at](http://www.kinderkrebsforschung.at)

#### **About the University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna**

The University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna in Austria is one of the leading academic and research institutions in the field of Veterinary Sciences in Europe. About 1,500 employees and 2,500 students work on the campus in the north of Vienna which also houses five university clinics and various research sites. Outside of Vienna the university operates Teaching and Research Farms. [www.vetmeduni.ac.at](http://www.vetmeduni.ac.at)

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