

Press release

Institut für Sozialmedizin, Epidemiologie und Gesundheitsökonomie

Direktor: Prof. Dr. Stefan N. Willich, MPH, MBA



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Prof. Dr. Claudia M. Witt, MBA
Vice Director

Head Project Division CAM

Phone: +49(0)30/450-529002

Fax: +49(0)30/450 529917

email: claudia.witt@charite.de

www.charite.de/cam

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Charité University Medical Center in Berlin Establishes First Chair for Research in Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) in Germany

Prof. Dr. Claudia Witt has been appointed holder of the new Karl and Veronica Carstens Foundation Endowed Chair for Research in Complementary/Alternative Medicine at the Charité University Medical Center in Berlin. For the first time in Germany, world-class research in this area of inquiry will thus be possible in the context of a university chair. Following an open competition, Claudia Witt was chosen for this prestigious appointment based on her outstanding scientific work and extensive teaching experience. As Prof. Dr. Detlev Ganten, chief executive officer of the Charité University Medical Center, notes, 'Charité is committed to the scientific study of medicine. We see a great need for research in complementary medicine and are delighted that Professor Witt was selected for this position. She is the ideal choice to confront the great challenges in this field.'

The chair will be located at Charité's Institute for Social Medicine, Epidemiology and Health Economics. A grant of €1 million will fund the professorship, as well as two associate positions, for a period of five years. With this grant, the Carstens Foundation hopes to promote research in the areas of naturopathy, homeopathy, and Chinese Medicine. The director of the foundation, Dr. Henning Albrecht, emphasises the important role the new chair will play in the future of complementary medicine: 'First-rate research is essential to ensure the long-term acceptance of complementary treatment methods and to incorporate these into everyday patient care. In this regard, the new chair at the Charité University Medical Center will play a key role in Germany. I'm confident that Professor Witt will strengthen the scientific underpinnings of complementary medicine, leading to increased recognition of its benefits.'

The Gap Between Real-world Treatment and Scientific Evidence

Professor Witt's main scientific interest lies in studying the efficacy, safety, and cost-effectiveness of complementary medical treatments, especially in the areas of Chinese medicine and homeopathy. In recent years, she has set international standards by coordinating a range of rigorously designed, large-scale studies on treatments such as acupuncture. Professor Witt is approaching her new position with great enthusiasm: 'More than sixty per cent of the German population uses complementary medicine, and yet we still know very little about its efficacy or

CHARITÉ - UNIVERSITÄTSMEDIZIN BERLIN

Address for visitors: Luisenstr. 57, 10117 Berlin, Tel: +49(0)30/450-529002
at the Zentrum für Human- und Gesundheitswissenschaften

potential side effects. I'm excited about this opportunity to help bridge the gap between real-world treatment and scientific evidence.'

A number of comprehensive research projects have already been planned for the coming years, including studies on individual treatment methods such as qigong, acupuncture, and homeopathy, as well as large interdisciplinary investigations of Chinese and Tibetan medicine. Another of Professor Witt's key interests is educating and supporting young physicians and scientists through undergraduate and graduate study, post-graduate training, and conferences.

Charité's Institute for Social Medicine, Epidemiology and Health Economics is the ideal place to pursue these goals. The institute's current director, Prof. Dr. Stefan N. Willich, looks to the future with confidence: 'Our institute has gained worldwide recognition for its first-rate research on complementary medicine. With Professor Witt's help, we will be able to continue to build upon this position in the future.'

Institute for Social Medicine, Epidemiology and Health Economics

Researchers at the Institute for Social Medicine, Epidemiology and Health Economics have been studying the efficacy and benefits of complementary medicine treatments since 1997. Their work, including studies on acupuncture and homeopathy in patients with chronic disease, has set international standards. As part of a model project funded by the Techniker Krankenkasse and other social health insurance funds in Germany, the institute designed and coordinated the largest study in the world on the efficacy, effectiveness, and cost-effectiveness of acupuncture. A total of 10,000 physicians and 300,000 patients took part in the investigation, and some 3 million acupuncture treatments were included in the analysis.

The Karl and Veronica Carstens Foundation

The Karl and Veronica Carstens Foundation was established in 1981 by the late President of Germany Prof. Dr. jur. Karl Carstens and his wife Dr. med. Veronica Carstens. The foundation promotes the use of the standards and guidelines set by current medical scientific research in naturopathy and homeopathy. It also places great importance on supporting upcoming generations of scientists and physicians. The long-term goal of the foundation is to integrate complementary medicine into research and teaching at university medical schools.

The foundation initiates its own projects and maintains a publishing house and specialised library. It supports clinical studies and basic research, and provides aid to young medical students through its graduate assistance program. The foundation receives its funding solely from donations and the membership fees paid by its 36,000 members to the supporting organisation Natur und Medizin.

Contact details

Prof. Dr. Claudia M. Witt, MBA
Vice Director, Head Project Division CAM
Institute for Social Medicine, Epidemiology
and Health Economics
Charité University Medical Center
10098 Berlin, Germany

Tel: +49 30 450529002
Fax: +49 30 450529917
Mobile: +49 1791172717
e-mail: claudia.witt@charite.de
www.charite.de/cam

Dr. Henning Albrecht
Director
Karl und Veronica Carstens-Stiftung
Am Deimelsberg 36
45276 Essen, Germany

Tel: +49 201 56305 15
Fax: +49 201 56305 30
e-mail: h.albrecht@carstens-stiftung.de
www.carstens-stiftung.de