

Annual Portrait

20
23

SAKK in Figures



1 network

made up of 22 regular members, one associate member, eight phase I sites, 15 research partners, 22 industry partners, 17 authorities and foundations, eight partner organizations

20

specialized bodies

working in project groups, working groups and sections

9

mentees

of the Young Oncology Academy took part in SAKK's support and mentoring program

25

open clinical trials

researching effective and well tolerated new cancer therapies and better treatments



79 employees

working in the Group's Competence Center

499

patients

we would like to thank for participating in our trials in 2023

39

scientific articles

published by oncologists and hematologists in scientific journals



5 awards

were presented to researchers by us in conjunction with our industry partners

10

Patient Advisory Board members

contributing the perspective of people living with cancer to our strategy, communications, trial development and trial conduct

Total Commitment and a Strong Network

2023 was a successful and active year for SAKK, and one that brought a host of innovations. In the midst of all this, we were able to strengthen our network.



CEO Dr. Hans Rudolf Keller, CSO PD Dr. Roch-Philippe Charles and I have visited all SAKK sites over the last two years. The discussions that have taken place during these visits have yielded valuable insights, particularly as regards cooperation with the sites and the sites' needs.

We submitted an application for funding for the period from 2025 to 2028 to the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation. In connection with this, and for the first time, we planned and submitted several projects jointly with the Swiss Clinical Trial Organisation. We also initiated our first-ever joint trial with the Swiss Paediatric Oncology Group. The success of the Swiss Oncology and Hematology Congress in November laid a strong foundation for the committed partnerships of the next few years.

The Young Oncology Academy was extremely successful once again in 2023 and we integrated the participants into our project groups as soon as the Academy had ended. We successfully issued our first call for proposals for the SAKK Network Trial Award in 2023 and will be repeating the call in 2024. SAKK published 39 manuscripts last year, a significant increase compared to 2022. I would particularly like to mention the work done by Dr. Stefanie Hayoz and her team (BMJ Open 2023). This work shows that SAKK successfully completes over 70% of all its trials. 90% of all trials are published in a peer-

reviewed journal, a figure that puts us well above the national and international average. This is compelling evidence of SAKK's professionalism and competitiveness.

We applied to the Swiss National Science Foundation for funding for seven projects in 2023. Although definitely a record figure, it is one associated with a significant workload.

During 2023, the SAKK Board devoted a lot of time and effort to SAKK's strategic direction going forward. We set up two Board committees: one to deal with our finances and one to work on our strategy. The aim is to pool the wide-ranging expertise of Board members and to prepare more efficiently for future challenges.

The above successes and all the important activities undertaken in 2023 would not have been possible without the total commitment of everyone involved—the members of the project groups, working groups and Scientific Committee, and everyone at the Competence Center. The entire Board would like to offer them its sincere thanks, as would I.

Prof. Dr. med. Miklos Pless, Board President

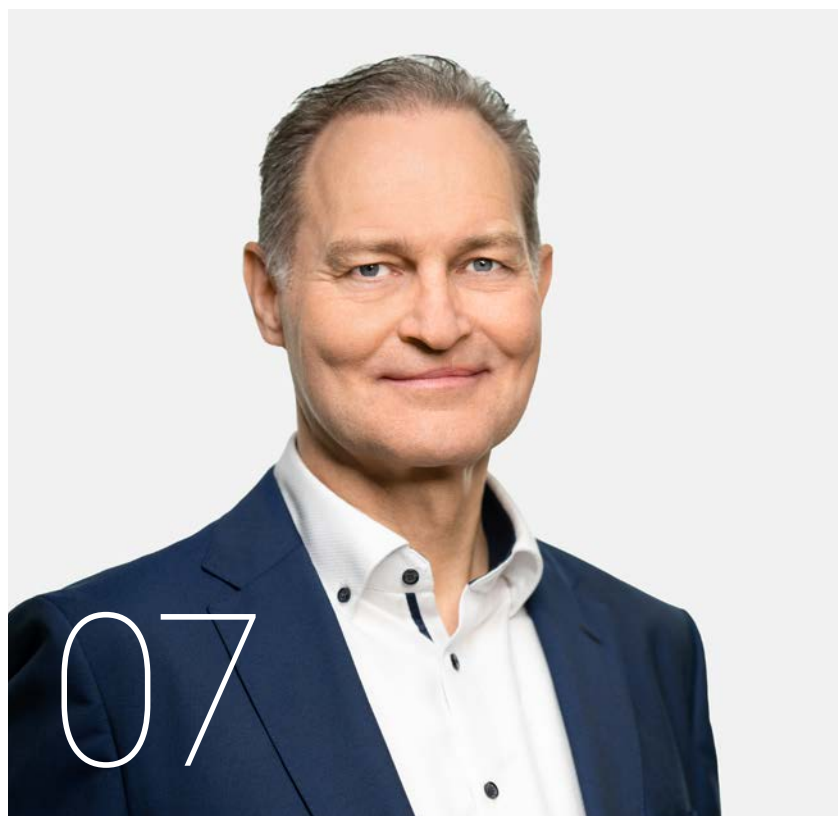
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SAKK 16/14: Good News for People with Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer

Behind every case of cancer is a person with their own story to tell, their own fears and needs. Providing the best possible care for these people and improving their quality of life is what drives us. Trial SAKK 16/14 is just one example.

Our Board

Our goal is to give Swiss cancer patients access to innovative treatments and improve their quality of life and chances of a cure. The Board, which is made of leading cancer experts and dedicated individuals, supports us in our efforts.



Prof. Dr. med. Dr. phil. nat. Sacha Rothschild, Vice President; Prof. Dr. med. Richard Cathomas; Dr. iur. Christian Rathgeb-Cavigelli; Marianne Binder-Keller Councillor of States; Prof. Dr. med. Miklos Pless, President; Dr. oec. HSG Willy Oggier; Silvia Schenker; Prof. Dr. med. Urban Novak

Board members from left to right

We would like to thank all Board members for their valuable support in driving forward clinical cancer research.

A Step Toward the Future



SAKK has defined its goals for the coming years as well as its strategy for 2024–2027. Effective structures and processes coupled with good corporate governance are creating a professional framework in which to achieve them. A discussion on 2023 with CEO Dr. Hans Rudolf Keller

Dr. Keller, what will SAKK's strategy be in the years ahead?

Dr. Hans Rudolf Keller: Our goal is to expand our role as the leading academic network for clinical cancer research in Switzerland.

We have defined six strategic action areas to help us achieve that goal: We will focus on our patients. We will strengthen our network. We will ramp up our research areas. We will optimize our service offering. We will engage on our employees' behalf and

ensure our autonomy through a broad funding base. Furthermore, target group-appropriate corporate management based on business management principles will ensure that SAKK is able to fulfill needs to the greatest possible extent—members' needs as much as the needs of partner organizations. Young talent also has a key role to play here, and we will continue to promote it for this reason.

What is your view of 2023 from a business perspective?

Dr. Hans Rudolf Keller: We continued to professionalize our structures and processes. In addition, we scheduled quarterly meetings with the Executive Committee and the people responsible for the individual trial projects to discuss the progress made in trials and decide on measures. Furthermore, we set up a Board committee to deal with finance. These initiatives have helped us improve our performance and bring the year to a positive end from a business perspective.

What contribution did governance make?

Dr. Hans Rudolf Keller: We strengthened our good corporate governance principles at all levels and made major progress on the compliance front. The committees and organizational structures established in 2022 also demonstrated their value during 2023. SAKK now has a firm and sustainable foundation for a successful 2024.

New Structure, Better Processes and More Activity

The Clinical Science and Clinical Operations departments were restructured during 2023 to enable them to provide more specific and professional support to stakeholders. Furthermore, a number of processes were optimized in Clinical Operations. The research groups experienced increased activity.



Clinical Operations

The new structure creates capacity that enables Clinical Operations to increase its contact with the sites. The team leaders have already visited the first ten sites and obtained valuable feedback. These exchanges enable us to identify and better understand the needs of the trial teams. We are now evaluating the feedback from the discussions and will then work with the teams to find ways to integrate the results as effectively as possible. Since the response from the network and the team leaders, regarding these visits, was very positive, further visits are planned for 2024.

Trial activities in Clinical Operations during 2023 were largely stable compared to previous years. At five, the number of new trials opened was relatively low. However, we used this opportunity to optimize a number of minor procedures within the department. The process optimization project will start in the coming year. Should it prove to be a success, the plan is to extend it to the organization as a whole.

Trial and Patient Figures

During 2023, we were able to motivate 499 patients to take part in SAKK's 25 open trials, registry trials

included. 440 of these patients were enrolled in a prospective trial. Eight of the 25 trials were closed to new patients during the year.

It is encouraging to see that activity in the research groups has increased again. Everything leads us to believe that we will be able to activate an increased number of trials in 2024. This not only gives us the opportunity to fully exploit our department's potential, it also enables us to systematically improve our contribution to new trials.

Christine Biaggi Rudolf,
Chief Operations Officer (COO)



Further information at
www.sakk.ch/en/annual-report

Quality Across the Board

SAKK makes an important contribution to the exploration of new paths in cancer treatment. Quality plays an important role here. Maintaining and refining it is a continuous, multifaceted task.



Swissmedic Confirms the High Standard of Quality at SAKK

Swissmedic is responsible for ensuring that only high-quality and effective therapeutic products are available in Switzerland. The Agency inspected SAKK anew in 2023, this time by focusing on the implementation of the CAPA plan from the previous year's inspection. The result of the desk-based inspection confirmed the high quality standards of clinical trials at SAKK, particularly in phase I.

Fully Prepared for the New Data Protection Act

Switzerland's revised Data Protection Act came into force in 2023. At SAKK, the task of ensuring compliance with the new provisions was shouldered by Legal Counsel Johanna Böhlen and external data protection consultant Dr. Michèle Balthasar. They produced a Data Protection Policy, authored internal guidelines and, where necessary, created a data protection impact assessment. Data Processor agreements ensure that data processor comply with the legal requirements. The data breach process that has been drawn up sets out the correct process for data breaches and ensures that the relevant agencies are informed. Similarly, a process for safeguarding the rights of affected individuals was produced. This ensures that the correct procedure is followed when requests for information or deletion are received. The patient information template and data

protection policy templates now comply with the requirements. All staff members were given data protection training. They have an internal point of contact they can approach with questions. SAKK is fully equipped to meet requirements to its usual standard of quality.

Céline Hummel,

Chief Quality & Compliance Officer

2023: the Year of Digital Transformation

The IT & Technology department successfully implemented over 20 projects in 2023.

- **Cloud:** The process of transferring SAKK's IT systems to the Cloud began in 2023.
- **Dice:** Once development is complete, this new reporting tool will make it possible to create reports quickly and consistently with just a few clicks.
- **Document repository:** SAKK now manages around two thirds of all its documents on Microsoft Teams. Its partners will also benefit from this type of collaboration going forward.

“We Want to Contribute to the Success of SAKK’s Research Projects”

Dr. Tourane Corbière-Nicollier and Michael Emmenegger-Müller are Patient Advisory Board members. They and their colleagues examine new proposals for clinical trials from the patient’s perspective. Their feedback helps improve the comprehensibility and accessibility of content. Thus they also make a valuable strategic contribution to involving patients more closely in SAKK’s work. An interview with two Patient Advisory Board members.

We have looked at a very large number of new clinical trial proposals this year. For the first time, we took part in a national research project that collects and evaluates cancer patients’ data while they are undergoing treatment. This data could be very important in improving treatments. Our role in this project is to develop and communicate easy-to-understand information on how to make patients’ “journey” easier for them.

” Our dialog with researchers is always outcome-driven.

Dr. Tourane Corbière-Nicollier

Dr. Tourane Corbière-Nicollier, Michael Emmenegger-Müller—what, in your view, are your most important tasks?

Dr. Tourane Corbière-Nicollier: We and our colleagues want to help ensure the success of SAKK’s research projects. A lot of trials address patients’ needs, for example because they reduce the side effects of treatment. We try to use our own words to describe what a trial sets out to achieve. That can help produce a layperson-accessible summary of the trial or make a contribution to the patient information. We also look at trial procedures, trying to assess how taking part in the trial will “feel” for patients and their families. Sometimes we can be a bit critical, but our dialog with researchers is always outcome-driven. That outcome is one that makes it easier to work on the trial and find support.

Michael Emmenegger-Müller: I joined in mid-2023 and was elected to the Patient Advisory Board in the fall. As co-president of Leben mit Lungenkrebs, an organization for lung cancer patients, I’m interested not only in research, but also in dialog with other patient organizations. We are all facing the same challenges. SAKK’s Patient Advisory Board is a forum where a layperson like me can make a contribution. I find the dialog with researchers both a very pleasant and productive experience. However, patient and public involvement (PPI) in clinical cancer research is still fairly new in Switzerland. That means that while SAKK may have set up its Patient Adviso-



Dr. Tourane Corbière-Nicollier



Michael Emmenegger-Müller

” The aim is to obtain feedback from someone who knows what the treatment feels like.

Michael Emmenegger-Müller

ry Board in 2015, researchers are still not used to seeking our feedback. They are open to our comments, but do not know what to expect from us.

SAKK offers Patient Advisory Board members annual training. That’s remarkable. Moreover, we meet four to six times a year. All that helps us acquaint the public better with the issue of clinical research, for example in the public presentations and discussion meetings that we organize regularly.

Being a Board member is equivalent to a 10 % FTE position. How do you find enough time for SAKK?

Dr. Tourane Corbière-Nicollier: As Patient Advisory Board members, we can always be consulted more often. Some donors specifically demand that. When I first started, we were only involved once trials had been approved and funding had been secured. We are now getting involved much earlier on. I also work 20% for Laboratoire des Patients (Patient Laboratory) at Swiss Cancer Center Léman, and I lead the multiple myeloma self-help group in Geneva. That means I have to divide my time up a bit. We have decided that it’s not essential for everyone to be involved in everything. Between three and five members of the Patient Advisory Board are now

consulted on each trial or project. I have also learned to say no when I’m tired. Our coordinator tries to distribute the workload evenly. In addition, we also receive draft result summaries in some cases. That makes our job easier too.

Michael Emmenegger-Müller: My condition means that the relatively new *Leben mit Lungenkrebs* and the SAKK Patient Advisory Board are as much work as I can manage, even if it’s just a small amount. If the work done by Patient Advisory Board members in Switzerland continues to increase, more patients and family members are going to have to get involved. EUPATI Switzerland and the University of Basel trained new patient experts in 2023, and Laboratoire des Patients organized courses for people affected by cancer and researchers. They want to

work with IOSI in Ticino and SAKK to provide courses again this year. That will help me find my bearings more easily. It is important for us to keep to timelines but still be able to discuss things sufficiently. And it's good to say no every so often. I agree with Tourane on that. Being a Patient Advisory Board member isn't a full-time job, even though it may have become so in some countries.

Is it possible to have effective representation of patient interests with a ten-member Patient Advisory Board?

Michael Emmenegger-Müller: Researchers are frequently of the view that they need to consult a patient with exactly the right cancer diagnosis. That's not necessary though. The aim is to obtain feedback from someone who knows what the treatment feels like, who knows what it's like to go through these therapies and interventions, and who can assess what it means to face up to and live with the fears.

9 **trial proposals**
discussed with the researchers

Dr. Tourane Corbière-Nicollier: Even if we feel we can't assess that ourselves, we still have a good network of people who can. I'm involved in a self-help group, for example, while others are in patient organizations. There are also scientific studies dedicated to patients' preferences, finding out, for example, what's more important after a diagnosis—extending life or improving quality of life. We also held a conversation at a Semi-Annual Meeting on why patients may decide not to take part in a trial. Issues of principle are not always the reason: there may also be practical or personal considerations. This attracted great interest and may even become the subject of a Master's thesis in the future. Such evidence-based advocacy is becoming ever more important. Nevertheless, it isn't possible to represent all patients and their families. It's still only a sample. But it's certainly a good thing that we're very diverse and can contribute a variety of perspectives and cultural backgrounds.

Summaries That Improve Understanding

The Patient Advisory Board initiated a move within SAKK to produce lay summaries of all completed trials from 2023. With support from the Rising Tide Foundation for Clinical Cancer Research (RTFCCR), the Patient Advisory Board produced six such summaries as part of a pilot project in 2023. The sites distributed them to trial participants and their families.



You will find one example here
<https://www.sakk.ch/en/news/results-trial-sakk-1614>

Our Patient Advisory Board

The Patient Advisory Board supports SAKK research projects by offering the patients' perspective on new proposals for clinical trials. The feedback improves the comprehensibility and accessibility of the proposals and makes a strategic contribution to bringing SAKK's work closer to patients.



Standing, left to right: Dr. Ursula Ganz-Blättler, Lorenz Tanner, Dr. Isabelle Roos, Dr. Bernd Hägele, Michael Emmenegger-Müller
Sitting, left to right: Rosmarie Pfau, Dr. Tourane Corbière, Aldo Fiscalini, Helga Meier Schnorf, Dr. Sander Botter

Sincere thanks to all members of the Patient Advisory Board for their commitment to promoting effective cancer treatments at all levels.

Developmental Therapeutics—a Journey of Discovery



The SAKK Developmental Therapeutics group carries out pioneering work in innovative early-phase trials and promotes cooperation on groundbreaking cancer treatments.

The SAKK Project Group Developmental Therapeutics (PG DT) was created in November 2019 from the merger of the former Project Group New Anticancer Treatments (PG NAT) with the Working Group Immunotherapy (WG IO) and Working Group Molecular Oncology (WG MO). By restructuring in this way, we intend to make optimal use of the expertise of all members and have robust trials in immunotherapy and non-immunotherapy, potential combinations between the two fields and strong translational programs.

Over the years, the project group has conducted innovative early-phase trials involving authorized and not yet authorized medicinal products, single agents or combinations of agents covering a range from chemotherapy to targeted therapy and immunotherapy, including first-in-human (FIH) trials. Trials designed to evaluate new therapies in combination with surgery, radiotherapy or medical devices were also conducted. SAKK and its eight inspected and approved phase I sites are delighted by new partnerships with the pharmaceutical industry that should provide patients in Switzerland with early access to innovative treatments.

The group took part in four early clinical trials and enrolled 23 patients into these trials in 2023.

In terms of scientific results, we published or contributed to the publication of three manuscripts in 2023 (on the SAKK 36/13, SAKK 57/16 and BASILEA CDI-CS-002 trials) and gave one presentation and presented three posters at important international conferences (see page 22 for more information).



Vice presidents of the Project Group Developmental Therapeutics: Dr. med. Dr. rer. nat. Christian Britschgi, Dr. med. Martina Imbimbo, Prof. Dr. med. Dr. phil. nat. Markus Jörger.

Our primary goals for the years ahead are to establish a strong collaborative relationships with the industry and with research laboratories in Switzerland and internationally, and to continue our strong cooperative relations with the other disease-specific groups within SAKK.

Examples of clinical trials active in 2023

SAKK 65/16 (NCT03387917): TLD-1, a novel liposomal doxorubicin, in patients with advanced solid tumors (PI D. Hess).

SAKK 67/20 (NCT04629781): Open-label dose escalation phase Ib trial of a new micellar docetaxel compound in patients with mCRPC (PI I. Colombo).

SAKK 66/17 (NCT03993678) Intratumoral injection of IP-001 following thermal ablation in patients with advanced solid tumors (PI M. Jörger), a clinical trial in which laser tumor ablation is combined with intratumoral injection of Immunophotonics' new immune stimulatory agent IP-001, has successfully completed the initial safety phase. Sarcoma and melanoma patients are currently being recruited for phase II of the trial. In November 2022, the fruitful cooperation between SAKK and Immunophotonics spawned an international trial with SAKK participation (IP-IIO-622-**SAKK 69/22 (NCT05688280)** Intratumoral injection of IP-001 following thermal ablation in pa-

tients with CRC, NSCLC, and STS (INJECTABL-1)). This trial is enrolling patients with advanced lung cancer, sarcoma and colorectal cancer.

Project Group Developmental Therapeutics

President

Prof. Dr. med. Anastasios Stathis
Oncology Institute of Southern Switzerland (IOSI)

Vice presidents

Dr. med. Dr. rer. nat. Christian Britschgi

University Hospital Zurich

Dr. med. Martina Imbimbo

Lausanne University Hospital (CHUV)

Prof. Dr. med. Dr. phil. nat. Markus Jörger

Cantonal Hospital St. Gallen

20 Research Groups

Our 20 specialized groups made a significant contribution to clinical research last year, developing trial proposals for the Directors' Committee and promoting interdisciplinary dialog to improve the treatment our patients receive.

Last year, our specialized bodies, consisting of a total of 20 research groups, made an enormous contribution to our scientific work. The groups provide an important platform for the initiation and development of trial proposals, which are submitted to SAKK's Directors' Committee for assessment.

Research group members have a unique opportunity to contribute proposals within their trial group and to engage in dialog with other experts. This interdisciplinary exchange is highly significant for the quality of our research and makes a crucial contribution to ensuring our patients receive the best possible treatment.

Thank you to everyone involved for their contribution and hard work relating to clinical cancer research.

Project Groups

Lung Cancer

President

Prof. Dr. med. Alessandra

Curioni-Fontecedro

Cantonal Hospital Fribourg (HFR)

Vice presidents

Dr. med. Laetitia Mauti

Cantonal Hospital Winterthur

Prof. Dr. med. Alfredo Addeo

Geneva University Hospitals (HUG)

Breast Cancer

President

PD Dr. med. Marcus Vetter

Cantonal Hospital Baselland, Liestal

Vice president

Prof. Dr. med. Peter Dubsy

Hirslanden Klinik St. Anna, Cham

Gastrointestinal Cancer

President

Dr. med. Alexander Siebenhüner

Clinic for Hematology & Oncology,

Hirslanden Zurich

Vice president

PD Dr. med. Sara De Dosso

Oncology Institute of Southern

Switzerland (IOSI)

Gynecological Cancer

President

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Geneva University Hospitals (HUG)

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Oncology Institute of Southern
Switzerland (IOSI)

Dr. med. Ursula Hasler-Strub

Cantonal Hospital Graubünden

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Prof. Dr. med. Thomas Pabst
Inselspital Bern
(University Hospital of Bern)

Vice president

Dr. med. Corinne Widmer-Widler
University Hospital Basel

Lymphoma**President**

Prof. Dr. med. Francesco Bertoni
Università della Svizzera italiana (USI)

Vice president

Prof. Dr. med. Thorsten Zenz
University Hospital Zurich

Developmental Therapeutics**President**

Prof. Dr. med. Anastasios Stathis
Oncology Institute of Southern
Switzerland (IOSI)

Vice presidents

Dr. med. Dr. rer. nat. Christian Britschgi
Cantonal Hospital Winterthur
Dr. med. Martina Imbimbo
Lausanne University Hospital (CHUV)
Prof. Dr. med. Dr. phil. nat. Markus
Jörger
Cantonal Hospital St. Gallen

Urogenital Tumors**President**

Dr. Ursula Vogl
Oncology Institute of Southern
Switzerland (IOSI)

Vice president

Dr. med. Alexandros Papachristofilou
University Hospital Basel

Working Groups**Head and Neck Cancer****President**

Dr. med. Vittoria Espeli
Oncology Institute of Southern
Switzerland (IOSI)

Vice president

PD Dr. med. Panagiotis Balermpas
University of Zurich and University
Hospital Zurich

**Supportive, Palliative and
Geriatric Oncology****President**

Prof. Dr. med. David Blum
University Hospital Zurich

Vice president

Dr. med. Vèrène Dougoud
Cantonal Hospital Fribourg (HFR)

**Imaging in Diagnostic and
Therapy Monitoring****President**

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Onkzentrum Zurich

Vice president

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Inselspital Bern
(University Hospital of Bern)

Melanoma**President**

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University Hospital Zurich

Vice president

Dr. med. Ioannis Metaxas
Spital Thurgau AG

Sarcoma**President**

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Inselspital Bern
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Cellular Therapies**President**

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Lausanne University Hospital (CHUV)

Vice presidents

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Lausanne University Hospital (CHUV)
PD Dr. med. Michael Daskalakis
Inselspital Bern (University Hospital of
Bern)
Prof. Dr. med. Heinz Läubli
University Hospital Basel
Prof. Dr. med. Dominik Schneidawind
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Vice president

PD Dr. med. Dr. phil. Emilie Le Rhun
University Hospital Zurich

Sections**Registries****President**

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Vice president

Dr. med. Petros Tsantoulis
Geneva University Hospitals (HUG)

Network for Outcomes Research**President**

PD Dr. med. Cédric Panje
Hirslanden Radio-Oncology, St. Gallen

**Network for Cancer Predisposition
Testing and Counseling****President**

Dr. med. Manuela Rabaglio-Poretti
Inselspital Bern
(University Hospital of Bern)

Vice president

Dr. med. Rossella Graffeo
Oncology Institute of Southern
Switzerland (IOSI)

Pathology**President**

Dr. med. Anne-Laure Rougement Pidoux
Geneva University Hospitals (HUG)

Radio-Oncology**President**

Prof. Dr. med. Nicolaus Andratschke
University Hospital Zurich

Vice president

Prof. Dr. Peliaga Tsoutsou
Geneva University Hospitals (HUG)



Further information at
www.sakk.ch/en/annual-report

“A Unique Opportunity to Make a More Effective Contribution to Oncology.”

The primary purpose of the Young Oncology Academy is to support the upcoming generation of oncologists. Nine junior doctors completed the promotion and mentoring program in 2023. Two of them, Dr. med. Saskia Hussung from University Hospital Zurich and Dr. med. José Luis Sandoval from Geneva University Hospitals HUG, answered a few questions for us.

Dr. Hussung, Dr. Sandoval, why did you apply to join the Young Oncology Academy (YOA)?

Dr. Hussung: I first heard about YOA from our head of department. He explained the program's importance in driving forward clinical and translational research and encouraged us to apply. I was also motivated by previous participants' reports on their experiences. They recommended the program as a way of improving professional skills and promoting collaboration. It represented a unique opportunity to improve my professional knowledge and make a more effective contribution to oncology.

Dr. Sandoval: I found out about YOA in an e-mail from the head of our department at Geneva University Hospitals (HUG). As an academic doctor and scientist, I want to develop and take part in clinical trials in oncology. YOA offered the perfect opportunity to expand my knowledge and skills and engage in dialog with colleagues at SAKK and throughout Switzerland.

What useful knowledge or skills did you acquire during your time with YOA?

Dr. Hussung: I acquired invaluable knowledge about state-of-the-art clinical and translational research methods, but I was also able to significantly improve my presentation and scientific writing skills. Moreover, the extensive networking opportunities gave me an insight into trial development and early-stage clinical trials. In short, a comprehensive skill set that will help me progress my career in cancer research.

Dr. Sandoval: I also found the presentation, feedback and writing sessions extremely useful. In the course of our careers, I think we will be slipping into roles that require strong skill sets in these areas ever more frequently. That applies to oral as well as written communication. In addition, the availability of mentors made it much easier to navigate the program. It was also beneficial to our dialog with the relevant SAKK working groups.



Dr. med. Saskia Hussung



Dr. med. José Luis Sandoval

What challenges did you overcome while taking part in YOA?

Dr. Sandoval: I took part in YOA while I was doing my mobility period in France. That meant long travel times to take part in YOA sessions. But the circumstances helped me make better use of my time. I understood the importance of making the best of things.

Dr. Hussung: One of my tasks was to summarize complex oncological principles for different target groups. That enabled me to significantly improve my ability to communicate scientific knowledge effectively, something that's invaluable to my career development. A valuable contribution that promotes useful discussion in the oncology community.

How much did YOA change your understanding of cancer research and treatment?

Dr. Hussung: Taking part had a huge impact on me, particularly the practical experience of trial development and early-stage clinical trials. I now have a much better understanding of cancer research and treatment. The various program modules, from statistical analysis to practical workshops, broadened my approach, making it more evidence-based and patient-centered.

Dr. Sandoval: YOA has given us insights into the inner workings of a cancer research network, high-

” I now have a much better understanding of cancer research and treatment.

**Dr. med. Saskia Hussung,
University Hospital Zurich**

lighting both the opportunities and challenges. It reinforced our view that cancer research is essentially a community undertaking.

What was the highlight of your time with YOA?

Dr. Sandoval: Being mentored by Prof. Dr. med. Pless. He supported my ideas and efforts to work with SAKK. I also met clever colleagues from across Switzerland with whom I will certainly work in the future.

Dr. Hussung: Picking just one highlight would be a challenge. Each module provided unique insights and plenty of opportunities to acquire invaluable skills, starting with the presentation and scientific writing courses through to the comprehensive training in statistical analysis. Each component played a key role in my development as a scientist. I'd wholeheartedly recommend the program to colleagues without any hesitation.

” YOA has had a positive impact on my career.

Dr. med. José Luis Sandoval,
Geneva University Hospitals

How do you plan to incorporate your YOA experience into your work going forward?

Dr. Hussung: I'd like to use the knowledge I've gained to improve patients' care by adopting evidence-based procedures and innovative treatment strategies. I'll also encourage a collaborative environment with my colleagues, for example by sharing insights and learning experiences with them so that I can help improve specialist knowledge in oncology.

Dr. Sandoval: I've integrated the findings from the feedback and communication sessions into my daily research work and clinical practice. As regards experience, I'd like to single out the Project Group Breast Cancer. Taking part opened up new opportunities to take part in future projects and cooperations throughout Switzerland.

Has taking part in YOA influenced your view of oncology?

Dr. Hussung: Taking part in YOA has profoundly enriched my view of oncology. It's encouraged me to adopt a multidisciplinary approach as well as having a significant career impact, for example by the unique contact with cutting-edge research, expert mentoring and extensive networking opportunities.

Dr. Sandoval: My view of oncology hasn't changed, but YOA has had a positive impact on my career. Not only have I acquired knowledge and skills, I've forged links with the right people within SAKK. I'll be able to work with them in the future when I develop new research projects and clinical trials.

Promoting the Next Generation

The eighth Young Oncology Academy took place successfully in 2023 under the leadership of Prof. Dr. med. Miklos Pless. Supported by eight mentors, we helped nine highly promising mentees navigate a challenging program. One notable new addition to the 2023 program was the introduction to statistics by Dr. Stefanie Hayoz.



Participants had the opportunity to attend international congresses such as ESMO in Madrid and EHA in Frankfurt. This both expanded their horizons and gave them valuable insights, experiences that were crucial to their career development.

One highpoint of the program was attending the ESTRO congress in Vienna, which provided opportunities for networking as well as for professional development. Furthermore, participants gained an insight into the work of a phase I trial site and attended courses on trial development and statistics.

The program could not have taken place without the generous support of our sponsors, Bayer, Janssen Oncology, Merck and Takeda. Their commitment was instrumental in implementing this challenging program and giving young talent a unique learning environment in which to develop their knowledge of oncology.

9 mentees

of the Young Oncology Academy took part in SAKK's support and mentoring program

We would also like to thank all the speakers and organizers who helped make Young Oncology Academy 2023 a success. Their dedication and expertise enriched the program and inspired participants.

We look forward keenly to the next Young Oncology Academy and to continuing to promote and support talented young oncology specialists.

Trial Results and Presentations



“ I’m delighted we were able to publish several high-profile articles in prestigious journals.

Dr. Stefanie Hayoz, Head of Statistics

Several high-profile articles published—two SAKK trials were published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*.

Scientific Publications

39 articles with SAKK contribution were published in various scientific journals last year (see link to publications). The number of articles is comparable to previous years (see summary via Link), but the median impact factor has risen: it is now 10.5 as opposed to between 4.3 and 6.2 from 2019 to 2022. While this is partly attributable to the high-profile publications of several trials conducted in partnership with cooperative groups, including three manuscripts in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, we were also able to publish several other SAKK trials in prestigious journals.

Of particular note here are trials SAKK 06/17 investigating perioperative chemoimmunotherapy with durvalumab for muscle-invasive urothelial carcinoma and SAKK 08/16 investigating darolutamide maintenance in patients with metastatic castration-resistant prostate cancer with non-progressive disease after taxane treatment. Both trials were pub-

lished in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, which currently has an impact factor of 45.3.

SAKK Presence at Oncology Congresses

With 26 posters and 19 oral presentations, SAKK also had a strong presence at the major oncology congresses as well as at more local events (Summary in Link).

A comprehensive table showing the number of manuscripts and congress presentations compared to previous years can be found in summary via Link.

Consulting Services and Reports on Clinical Trials

As part of our statistical advisory work, we were also able to assist with 32 non-SAKK projects of varying sizes and contribute to presentations and manuscripts. The number of consulting projects rose in comparison with previous years, when the number was generally around 20.

The statistics team produced 20 clinical trial reports, including 11 final reports for the authorities.



Further information at
www.sakk.ch/en/annual-report

A Broad Spectrum of Tasks

Clinical trials are valuable. For patients, just as much as researchers. They give people living with cancer access to groundbreaking treatments and increase the quality of their treatment. It is the task of the Clinical Science department to ensure that all procedures are clearly structured and reviewed. But this describes only a small part of its activities.



The Clinical Science department is in charge of a broad spectrum of tasks. It accompanies every SAKK trial right from the initial idea. It supports the principal investigators (PIs, the researchers responsible for the trial), with evaluation, revision and approvals. It is also on hand to assist on funding issues.

Working with all the other departments, Clinical Science also takes the lead on trial development. It helps the groups develop their strategy and the associated pipeline. Furthermore, it activates the SAKK LuCa and SAKK OvCaR registries. The LuCa in SAKK LuCa stands for lung cancer. This project investigates health data from patients with advanced EGFR-mutated non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC). SAKK OvCaR records data from patients with ovarian cancer. Its aim is to create a better understanding of the modalities of diagnosis and treatment and of the results in ovarian cancer patients in Switzerland.

SAKK is also fast-tracking the SAKK 38/23 Liberty trial, the trial that is the product of the SAKK Network Trial Award. The award has prize money of CHF 1 million and invites proposals from doctors in the SAKK network.

Within the SAKK network, Clinical Science manages meeting organization and collects members' feedback. SAKK developed a roadshow specifically for this purpose in 2023. This provides a way of determining needs and identifying potential for improvement in direct dialog with hospitals.

Clinical Science also promotes dialog outside the network, with organizations such as the European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer or Cancer Trials Ireland, for example. It also organizes meetings with pharmaceutical, biotech and start-up companies. And last, but not least, it has a visible presence at Swiss Biotech Day, the American Society of Clinical Oncology and the European Society for Medical Oncology. By doing so, Clinical Science strengthens international cooperation for the wellbeing of patients in Switzerland and around the world.

PD Dr. Roch-Philippe Charles,
Chief Scientific Officer



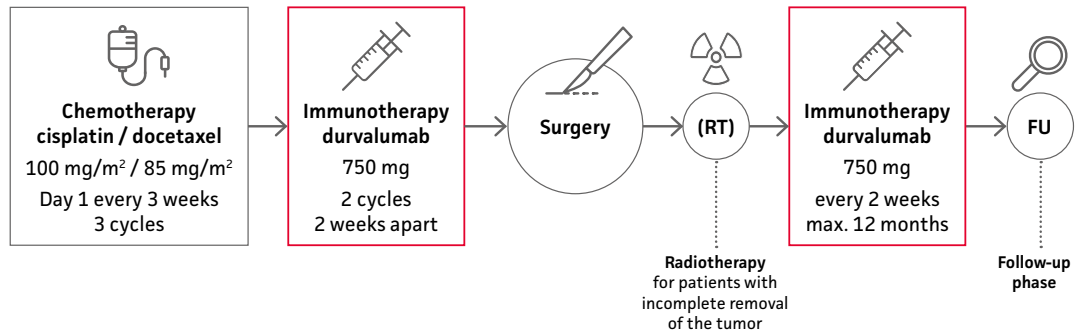
Good News for People with Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer

Behind every case of cancer is a person with their own story to tell, their own fears and needs. Providing the best possible care for these people and improving their quality of life is what drives us. It enables us to fund trials that give patients access to the medical options of tomorrow. Trial SAKK 16/14 is just one example.

Patients with locally advanced non-small cell lung cancer first receive therapy, then they undergo surgery. But for more than half of them, sadly, that's not the end of the story because their cancer returns within a year of their initial diagnosis. SAKK 16/14 was the first trial in the world to investigate whether immunotherapy administered in addition to standard treatment could improve this prognosis. The results are highly encouraging.

SAKK 16/14 is a single-arm phase II trial involving 68 patients with stage IIIA(N2) (T1-3 N2 M0) NS-CLC. Neoadjuvant chemotherapy comprised three cycles of cisplatin and docetaxel at three-week intervals.

Treatment path



This was followed by two cycles of durvalumab, an antibody that targets PD-L1, at a two-week interval. The patients continued to receive durvalumab for one year after surgery at the same interval. 68 patients took part in the trial between 2016 and 2019. The primary endpoint of the trial was event-free survival (EFS) after one year. The statistical hypothesis was an improvement in this value from 48% to 65% based on trial SAKK 16/00.

81.1% of patients underwent resection after pre-surgery neoadjuvant treatment. The pathological complete remission rate was 18.2%. 60.0% experienced major pathological remission, which is defined as ≤10% remaining viable tumor cells. EFS after one year was 73.3%. After median follow-up in excess of five years, median EFS was four years. Median overall survival was not achieved. As yet,

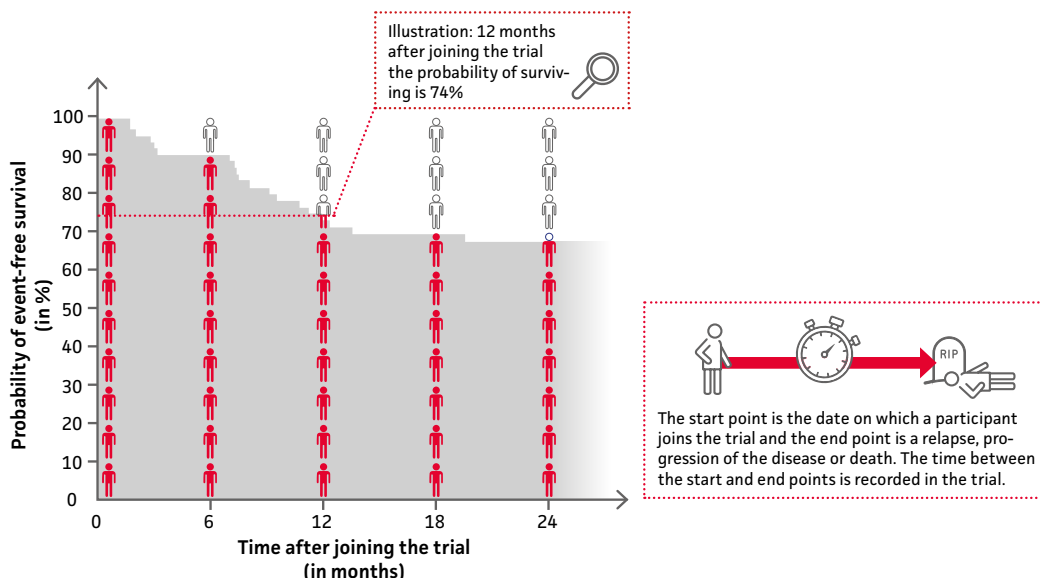
SAKK 16/14 is the only trial with a follow-up period in excess of five years. It will continue until 2025.

However, the results already far exceed expectations and statistical assumptions. This is good news not only for the patients who took part in the trial, but also for future patients and the research itself.

68

patients took part in the trial

Event-free survival



“It is Essential to Continue to Show Solidarity.”

2023 presented several challenges for SAKK. The organization learned the lessons and put a raft of measures in place so that it is ready for future requirements. A discussion with Board President Prof. Dr. med. Miklos Pless.



Prof. Dr. Miklos Pless, what are the issues that will be keeping SAKK busy going forward?

Our priority for 2024 is our trial pipeline, which we urgently need to stock up so that we are ready for the future. We will not get extra federal funding this year. That means firstly that we will have to tap into new resources, for example by acquiring alternative sources of funding, and secondly that we will have to analyze and optimize processes within our Competence Center. By doing so, we will further improve our organization's efficiency.

What role does state funding play here?

State funding is essential for SAKK's work. In March 2024, parliament decided to create a national cancer plan for Switzerland. We will be making an active contribution to this important national guideline. Part of our contribution will be to emphasize the necessity of funding clinical research.

What provision has been made for young oncologists?

In addition to the established and very popular Young Oncology Academy, SAKK plans to launch a clinical PhD program with a university hospital, thereby adding an additional scheme for promoting young talent.

What is SAKK doing to raise awareness of its work?

We intend to liaise with all our stakeholders and intensify links with them. This will primarily involve our members, but will also include our partners in the pharmaceutical industry, the organizations that support our research, such as the Swiss National Science Foundation, Swiss Cancer Research and the Rising Tide Foundation, the responsible government agencies and our patients.

Will there be additional changes beyond these?

Dr. Hans Rudolf Keller has decided to leave SAKK in summer 2024.

What do you think will be the key success factor in the years ahead?

It is essential to continue to show solidarity, both among SAKK members and with their organization. After all, we can only overcome the challenges that lie ahead together.

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Publisher and point of contact

Swiss Group
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SAKK Competence Center
Effingerstrasse 33
3008 Bern
Switzerland

Phone +41 31 389 91 91
Media inquiries: media@sakk.ch
sakk.ch

SAKK donations account

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It is available in German, English and French. The
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Annual Financial Report 2023



www.sakk.ch/en/annual-report

**Swiss Group
for Clinical Cancer Research SAKK**
Effingerstrasse 33, 3008 Bern, Switzerland
sakk.ch

