

Confidences de Salon



Daiana Stolz is the ERS Education Council Chair. She is an Associate Professor of Respiratory Medicine and Head of the Research Group of the Clinic of Respiratory Medicine and Pulmonary Cell Research at University Hospital Basel. She completed her residency in internal medicine and fellowship in pulmonary medicine in Switzerland and her Master of Public Health and Quantitative Methods at the Harvard School, USA. She is the past president of the European Board of Accreditation in Pneumology. Her research interests include characterising disease progression and exacerbation in order to improve therapeutic strategies in COPD and asthma. Her research group has contributed several studies on pulmonary and systemic biomarkers.

Did you always dream of being involved in medical research/healthcare?

I grew up confronted with my grandmother's disability due to her severe COPD symptoms. I vividly remember the desperate (and unsuccessful) efforts of my mother in trying to motivate her to quit smoking. Having experienced the situation of a family member suffering from a condition for which there is no cure made me aware of the limitations of medicine quite early in life. When my grandmother passed away, due to severe emphysema, I realised that I would like to actively contribute to improving patient care in the pulmonary field. I engaged in pulmonary research during my first semester at medical school, at the age of 16. My first study focused on chronic cough. I may have changed continents three times in my life, but I have never stopped enjoying the research journey.

What is the best advice you had when you were starting your professional career?

My first mentor during medical school told me not to forget that "Life is a marathon, not a sprint". I try to remember his advice every time things run a bit slower than I would wish (something that happens too often...).

What advice would you give someone at the beginning of their professional career?

Do not let anyone tell you that you cannot achieve what you aim for. Follow your instincts, but be

open to advice. Good clinical training is exquisitely important; choose your positions and mentors judiciously. Consider where you want to be in 5 and 10 years and what you have to do to get there. The ERS is a great learning and networking environment, ensure you join an assembly and connect with your peers. And, if you want to have kids: make sure your parents or in-laws live close by.

What has been the greatest change to make a difference in your field in your lifetime?

The extended possibilities offered by diagnostic and therapeutic flexible bronchoscopy, particularly endobronchial ultrasound. In the pulmonary field as a whole, the development of cystic fibrosis transmembrane conductance regulator modulator therapies, designed to correct the function of the defective protein made by the CF gene. It is a ground-breaking evolution because these agents target the basic defect as opposed to targeting the effects of the disease.

What do you foresee being the next great thing and what do you foresee as being the biggest challenge in your field in the next 10 years?

I believe we will see a growing individualisation and personalisation of diagnosis and therapy, which will make precision medicine possible. This development is already underway in the treatment of lung cancer and to some extent in the asthma field, and has the potential to improve the effectiveness and safety of

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treatment. Considering the tremendous therapeutic progress achieved, I foresee the biggest challenge to society will be reaching a consensus on which interventions should be offered to whom. The criteria to take this educated decision could potentially include the number of quality-adjusted life-years gained and the overall budget of a healthcare system. In public health terms, we will have to make sure to afford the most effective therapies for those who would benefit the most from it.

What is your favourite scientific breakthrough from any field?

The discovery of the DNA molecule, which was identified in the late 1860s. Thanks to this we now know a great deal about genetic structure and we continue to make great strides in understanding the human genome. For instance, the recent development of the CRISPR/Cas genome editing tool promises exciting new treatment possibilities for several diseases. The advent of the polymerase chain reaction (PCR), which allowed specific detection of DNA, radically advanced not only criminology (think CSI Miami) but also diagnostic techniques (e.g. detection of viruses and bacteria) and molecular biology research.

How do you see the future of the ERS?

The ERS will flourish by providing high quality educational programmes and training opportunities in respiratory medicine for respiratory physicians and allied health professionals. We will advance the field by creating online personalised learning experiences, by using artificial intelligence to provide customised suggestions empowering members to make individual decisions, by applying gamification for the evaluation of knowledge and skills, and by certifying competencies based on a structured syllabus in all eight main respiratory disease areas. We have a bright future ahead!

When are or were you happiest?

I love to travel and have just visited Fernando de Noronha, a paradisiac island in Brazil. The sound of the waves mixed with the laughter of my kids in the background is music to my ears... Back in reality, I must admit that the joy of analysing an self-designed, properly powered placebo-controlled study (and finding significant, clinically relevant results) can be thrilling.

What do you dislike most?

Unfounded statements, brainless rules, lack of creativity, unfair reviewers, and "your call is important to us..."

Whom would you most like to thank?

The late Prof. Bruno Carlos Palombini, for introducing me to the love of patient care and clinical research, and for teaching me resilience in a challenging environment and to never stop believing in serendipity; Prof. Richard Irwin, for being a role model as a physician, scientist, educator, and human being; and Prof. Michael Tamm, for teaching me so much more than medical knowledge.

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

Being honoured with a research professorship from the Swiss National Foundation, which allowed me to establish my clinical and translational research group on airway diseases.

Who are your heroes in real life?

People who, despite living with major physical, emotional or financial limitations, manage to keep a sense of humour and are thankful for being alive.

Where would you most like to live?

In a country with Swiss organisation, French food, Italian fashion, Greek hospitality and Brazilian weather.

What is or was your greatest journey?

Travelling throughout Australia, followed by an expedition to the Philippines, leaving from Sydney, which included a number of pacific islands such as the Salomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Palau. The tour to the region of the Sepik River, which is quite an isolated area, was particularly fascinating.

What qualities do you appreciate most in your friends?

An alert mind and a good sense of humour.

What qualities do you appreciate most in your colleagues?

Intelligence and integrity.

What is your personal motto?

"*Aut viam inveniam aut faciam*" – "I shall either find a way or make one".

What do you consider to be your strengths and weaknesses?

I am full of passion and energy and have a rational mind. My main weakness is that in a conversation truth tends to be more important than people's sensitivities.