



Rolf M. Zinkernagel

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Born and raised in Basel, Rolf Zinkernagel studied at the Medical School of the University of Basel, obtaining his MD degree in 1968, and graduating to become a surgeon.

After working as a surgeon for a little over a year, Rolf Zinkernagel chose to focus on immunological research, undertaking a postgraduate course in experimental medicine at the University of Zurich; and subsequently spending two years in the Institute of Biochemistry of Lausanne working on immunity against infections. From 1973-1975 he became a PhD student, and later a post-doctoral researcher, at the John Curtin School of Medical Research of the Australian National University, Canberra, where Peter Doherty and he made seminal observations on how cytotoxic T cells recognize virus infected cells in an infected host (Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine 1996). Rolf Zinkernagel moved to the Scripps Clinic and Research Foundation in La Jolla, United States, from 1975 to 1979, where he studied T cell maturation and development of the T cell repertoire, dependent on the transplantation antigen expression in the thymus. In 1980 he joined the Department of Pathology, University of Zurich, as an associate professor where, together with Hans Hengartner, he has been studying immune protection and immunopathology caused by virus infections. Over the past 25 years within the Experimental Pathology group, and after 1992 the Institute of Experimental Immunology, he studied the role of antigen dependent beneficial immune protection or detrimental immunopathology, and compared these mechanisms with theories of immunological memory and immunological tolerance. He has retired from the University in Spring 2008.

Besides his interest in solving uncertainties and discrepancies in immunology, Rolf Zinkernagel tries to further biomedical research and its application in Zurich, in Switzerland and Europe. He has supported gene technology and animal experimentation in various locations in Switzerland and Europe, has been member of the Swiss Science Council, is now a member of the European Research Council and of the Executive Council of the International Union of Immunological Societies. He has also helped to popularize science in tabloid newspapers.