



Rachel Horne Prize

GERMAN NEUROLOGIST WINS 2024 RACHEL HORNE PRIZE FOR WOMEN'S RESEARCH IN MS

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Professor Kerstin Hellwig is being honoured for her pioneering research into understanding and navigating the safety of approved treatments for women with multiple sclerosis (MS) before, during and after pregnancy – so as to ensure the health of both mother and child.

Professor Hellwig, a senior consultant at St Josef Hospital, Ruhr University, Bochum in Germany, specialises in MS and neuroimmunology and is a leading clinician-scientist in the field of MS and family planning.

She is also chair and founder of the German MS and Pregnancy Registry (DMSKW), the nationwide, observational cohort study of pregnant women with MS or Neuromyelitis Optica Spectrum. Set up by Dr Hellwig in 2006, the register currently holds information on more than 5,000 pregnancies.

“We are delighted to award the **Rachel Horne Prize** to Dr Kerstin Hellwig from a strong field of entrants,” said Professor Emmanuelle Waubant, chair of International Women in MS (iWiMS) who oversaw the review and judging process.

“This prize recognises Dr Hellwig’s exceptional clinical research work over the past two decades that has improved the care of women with MS. As a result of her ground-breaking work, physicians now have evidence-based information to optimise the treatment of women with MS during this critical time of their life, minimising the risk for the mother and baby.”

Dr Kerstin Hellwig will receive the award at the 40th Congress of the European Committee for Research in Multiple Sclerosis (ECTRIMS) in Copenhagen, Denmark, on 20 September 2024.

Dr Hellwig said: “I am thrilled to receive this award, which recognises the importance of clinical research in combination with different aspects of women’s health.”

“Twenty years ago, we knew about the natural course of MS during pregnancy and postpartum. Now we get a granular picture of the complicated interplay of the exposure of different disease modifying therapies on infants’ health, and also the effect of the withdrawal of the drugs on maternal health. In a disease where young women during childbearing age are affected, and potent treatments are available, this information is urgently needed and providing it in an informed decision process is modern medicine.’

Professor Hellwig went to medical school at Ruhr University, undertook an internship in Tanzania, a year at the Université Louis Pasteur, France, and her final year at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa. In 2012, she secured a prestigious German Research Foundation grant to train in clinical research at the University of Southern California, USA, which included a research project under the mentorship of Dr Annette Langer-Gould.

The US\$40,000 prize, to be used at the discretion of the recipient, is made possible by the generosity of the Horne Family Charitable Foundation.

Award founder Rachel Horne said: “I am so pleased to see Dr Hellwig has won this year’s prize. MS is disproportionately diagnosed in young women, many of whom want to still have children. Yet historically there has been little research on how best to combine MS treatments while also making safe, informed decisions around family planning. Professor Hellwig has led the way in changing this. So thank you.”

EDITOR’S NOTES

ABOUT THE RACHEL HORNE PRIZE FOR WOMEN’S RESEARCH IN MS

The Rachel Horne Prize recognises a woman scientist for their outstanding contribution to research in the understanding and treatment of women’s specific health issues in MS.

Established in 2023, the international prize of US\$40,000 is judged through International Women in MS (www.iwims.world) and supported by the European Committee for Treatment and Research in Multiple Sclerosis (ECTRIMS www.ectrims.eu).

ABOUT MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

MS is an unpredictable, often disabling disease of the central nervous system. Currently there is no cure, but treatments are available. An estimated 2.8 million people live with MS in the world. It is usually diagnosed between the ages of 20-50, with women three times more often affected compared to men. MS symptoms vary from numbness, tingling, vision, cognitive and mobility challenges.

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