

A tribute to Werner Franke

Werner Franke, a renowned biologist, professor of cell biology, and founder of the German Cell Biology Society, passed away in November 2022, leaving behind a vast scientific legacy that earned him a reputation as one of the most esteemed and respected cell and molecular biologists of his time.

Born in Paderborn in East Westphalia, Werner Franke pursued his education in biology, chemistry, and physics at the University of Heidelberg, where he received his degree in 1966 and his Ph.D. in 1967. He held academic positions at both the University of Freiburg and the University of Heidelberg, as well as the German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ) in Heidelberg. In 1986, he was appointed as a full professor of cell biology at the University of Heidelberg and served as the managing director of the Institute for Cell and Tumor Biology at DKFZ from 1980 to 1991.

Werner Franke made significant contributions to the field of modern cell and molecular biology. His research focused on the cytoskeletal proteins and their role in cell organization and function. Together with his team, he identified and characterized various components of scaffold proteins ("junctions"), which serve as anchors for cytoskeletal fibers and can connect cells to form tissue. His scientific papers and micrographs were a clear blend of science and art, and his endless curiosity and joy to discover the "undiscovered" were admired by all who knew him.

Werner Franke was highly respected in the scientific community. He was a founding member of the German Society for Cell Biology in 1975, and served as its president from 1999 to 2001. He also acted as the president of the International Society of Differentiation, vice-president of the International Federation of Cell Biology, and president of the European Cell Biology Organization. During his career, Werner Franke received several awards and recognitions for his work, including the Wilhelm-und-Maria-Meyenburg Prize for Cancer Research in Heidelberg and the Ernst Jung Prize for Medicine. He was also elected a member of both the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO) and the European Cell Biology Organization (ECBO). In addition to his scientific achievements, Werner Franke was also known to the wider public as a sharp critic of doping in sports. He was a tireless campaigner against all attempts to cover up drug abuse in sports, and he used his scientific expertise to help detect and expose doping in numerous high-profile cases.

Werner Franke left a remarkable legacy in the fields of cell biology and cancer research, as well as his unwavering commitment to ethics in science and sports. He was an inspiration to numerous colleagues and students with his passion and dedication to the field of biology. He is survived by his wife, two children, and a large number of people whose lives he touched in numerous ways. In celebration of his achievements, a collection of individual contributions from his colleagues and former students is published along with this letter. These letters aim to honor Franke's scientific achievements, as well as his engaging personality, enthusiasm as a scientist and colleague, and eagerness to contribute to science even in retirement.