

# STICK TO WHAT YOU KNOW...

As cold war kids, we were instructed to crouch beneath our desks in class during monthly air raid drills, our arms shielding our heads and our mouths slightly open. In those years I had recurring nightmares in which I was caught up in war actions in our small street in Rotterdam, where my father would invariably come to my rescue. His tie would flap over his shoulder as he ran towards me, yet he would always trip over a loose paving stone just before reaching my side ...

At present, countless children around the world do not have the luxury of waking up safely in their beds after a nightmare of war; instead, they are living amidst it. Senseless aggression is escalating in various parts of the globe, while violent protests against this aggression are also erupting worldwide, with even our universities and their infrastructure not being spared. We all share concerns about our world, and people are eager to respond and support those in need. However, should universities be providing space for political activism?

Already in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Wilhelm von Humboldt proposed his vision on external influences in our universities. He advocated for academic freedom as a fundamental principle for universities, and that researchers and lecturers should be free to conduct research and teach without interference from the state or other external forces. His concept of academic freedom thereby implies a separation between politics and academic activities, as politics could potentially hinder free intellectual exchange. This is exactly what we are witnessing today: violent demonstrations in our universities are aimed at preventing scientific interaction with other universities. In addition, Humboldt emphasised autonomy of universities, believing that they should be self-governing, free from political pressure or control. This would

ensure that universities could focus on their primary goals: the advancement of knowledge and the development of free, critical individuals.

Despite this, our free-thinking and critical academic individuals will naturally have strong opinions on the current geopolitical turmoil, and perhaps it is their responsibility to actively engage in political discussions. However, it is important that they take these discussions and actions outside our universities.

*“Auf diese Weise muss die Idee einer Akademie als die höchste und letzte Zufluchtsort der Wissenschaft und die vom Staat am meisten unabhängige Corporation festgehalten werden, und man muss es einmal auf die Gefahr ankommen lassen, ob eine solche Corporation durch zu geringe oder einseitige Tätigkeit beweisen wird, dass das Rechte nicht immer am leichtesten unter den günstigsten äusseren Bedingungen zu Stande kommt oder nicht”!*

Interestingly, in this part of one of his concluding paragraphs Humboldt seems to suggest that true academic freedom and progress are not necessarily the result of the most favourable external circumstances, but rather of the institution itself and its commitment to science and research.

Such dedication within our institute has led us to catalogue successful translational research initiatives and their researchers. This effort has recently led to the establishment of a large internal CARIM-Heart+Vascular Center programme: CARIM+HVC Lighthouse. This programme is committed to curing a hereditary heart disease by 2030 through the use of CRISPR/Cas9 DNA correction on iPSC-derived patient-specific heart tissue, prior to implementing clinical interventions.



Never before has such a comprehensive and distinctive programme been launched within our institute, and never have the pieces of the puzzle been so clearly laid out for us to make this a success.

The atmosphere in the Lighthouse research team is energising; there is a buzz of enthusiasm, and everyone is motivated to commit fully to science. After all, let us not forget why we exist as researchers. It is our intrinsic drive to unravel nature and to understand and cure cardiovascular disease that has given us the opportunity to dedicate our lives to this beautiful field, alongside sharp, smart and pleasant colleagues. And even though our scientific world is currently filled with fashions and trends, we must never lose sight of our scientific aims. Conduct research, write grants, publish well, perform our academic duties, educate researchers, inform society, and above all, be a good mentor. Do it well and get better at it.

Our unique stronghold of cardiovascular research has paid off, making you realise what a relatively small gathering of founders have accomplished by strategic combination of basic and clinical disciplines and becoming translational *avant la lettre*. Our unique comprehensive niche originated from combining research on all cardiovascular tissues of blood, vessels, and heart. I must say that our founders did exceptionally well by creating a blueprint that challenged their contemporaries and has grown into one of the most successful cardiovascular research institutes in Europe.

In our current annual report, we look back on 35 years of CARIM, our fantastic 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary summer night party,

and we compiled many interviews with established and coming leaders in our field to learn from their news and views. Our HS-BAFTA grants programme for the young and talented continues to be a success, and this year our first Anna Maria van Schurman Stipend will be awarded to a young female researcher. Each of our divisions showcases one of their highlights, clearly illuminating CARIM's strategy of early recognition, regeneration, and repair. We show our acquired personal grants and contracts, and all honours and prizes awarded to our fellow CARIM employees in this anniversary year.

All these topics lay in front of you, in our annual report that is packed with spirit, pictures, progress, and commitment, while looking back on 35 years of cardiovascular science, in which CARIM surely has made a difference.

This is CARIM 2023.

I hope you enjoy your reading.

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Scientific Director CARIM  
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[1] Wilhelm von Humboldt. Memorandum for the Ministry of the Interior: Über die innere und äussere Organisation der höheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten in Berlin (1809/10).