



Obituary

Professor Dirk Hellhammer (1947–2018)
45 years of influential psychoneuroendocrinology research



With great sadness we announce that emeritus Professor Dirk Hellhammer has passed away on December 1. We have lost a pioneer of psychoneuroendocrinology (PNE), a highly inspiring academic teacher, a mentor, and a dear friend.

Dirk studied psychology at the University of Würzburg in Bavaria and received a PhD in 1978 for his thesis that he had completed at the Max-Planck-Institute for Brain Research in Frankfurt (Germany). He spent his postdoc years (1980–81) in Indianapolis (USA) and returned to work at the University of Münster and the Max-Planck Research Group for Reproductive Medicine in Münster, Germany. It was in this very research laboratory, that Dirk would open up new avenues for PNE by measuring steroid hormone levels in saliva samples. With a true global perspective, he told young scientists already in the early 1980's: "If you want to have a successful career, you either need a novel research question, or you have to develop new research tools!" As it turned out, the latter would become his gift to PNE researchers.

After accepting the offer of a full-tenured professorship he became Chair of Clinical and Biological Psychology at the University of Trier, he and his students rapidly broadened the PNE researcher's toolbox. His lab evaluated and further developed the non-invasive assessment of

cortisol and several other steroid hormones in saliva. Further on, he and his team introduced the *Trier Social Stress Test* (which is now often shorthanded *The Trier*) and defined the *Cortisol Awakening Response* (CAR) as a prominent index of hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal axis functioning. The last two decades of his work as a progressive PNE thinker was largely dedicated to the development of a novel hormone-based diagnostic system, the *Neuropattern*[™]. With this system Dirk successfully translated his view of a conceptual psychobiology into a clinical tool.

Dirk hosted a memorable ISPNE conference in Trier in 1998 and headed the society as its president from 2002 to 2005 and received the *ISPNE Lifetime Achievement Award* in 2012. He continued to be a most valuable consultant in all matters of the society until his very last days.

Young scientists and their careers were always dearest to his heart. Connecting his students and postdocs with leading scholars from all over the world, he helped to pave the next generation's way into their own academic future. And he was indeed quite a successful academic teacher and mentor! Well over 20 of his former students now hold positions as full-tenured professors in Germany, Switzerland, and the USA. They are the *Trier School of Psychoneuroendocrinology*, the legacy of Dirk Hellhammer.

We deeply mourn the loss.

Past-President ISPNE

Conflict of interest

None.

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