

Report of the Event “Career, Motivation & Ethics in Pediatrics” the 08.02.2022 via Zoom

Overall description of the event:

The event “Career, Motivation and Ethics in Pediatrics” was part of a series of online-talks organized by the Institute for Biomedical Ethics of the University of Basel in celebration of its 10th anniversary. All the events that were part of this series addressed the career path, the motivations and obstacles of academic leaders and medical professionals. The underlying idea of the talk series was that students had the opportunity to ask whatever might be of interest to them at the start of their own career in the healthcare sector. With the help of an online-tool, students voted for questions that were of relevance to them, which were then asked by the moderators. The talk the 8th of February focused on the field of pediatrics and the invited guests were Prof. Klara Posfay-Barbe and Prof. Urs Frey.

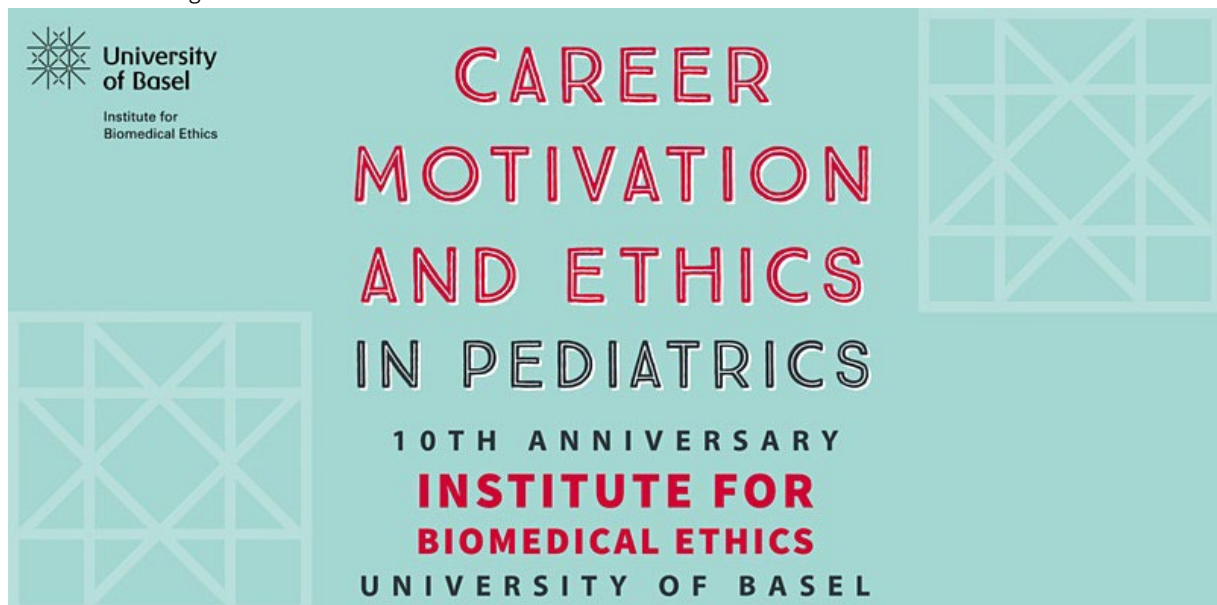
Prof. Klara Posfay-Barbe is the Head of the Infectious Disease Unit and the Division of General Pediatrics at the Children’s Hospital of Geneva, and Deputy Medical Director at the University Hospitals of Geneva. Prof. Urs Frey is chairman of the National Steering Board (Swiss Personalized Health Pediatric Network), and Chair of Pediatrics at the Children’s University Hospital Basel.

Possible pictures to be included on the IBMB-website:

From left to right: Prof. Klara Posfay-Barbe, Prof. Urs Frey, Prof. Bernice Elger and the two moderators, Nathalie Neeser and Vanessa Steger.



Poster advertising the event:



In the following, a selection of the questions answered by the two guests are displayed. The goal of this report was to let the answers be as authentic as possible to give an insight into the event. A warm thank you to Prof. Posfay-Barbe and Prof. Frey for their time and the insightful conversation and to everyone involved in the organization and realization of the talk series.

An insight into the building of Prof. Posfay-Barbe's and Prof. Frey's careers

Prof. Posfay-Barbe: For me, everything started when I was only 3 years old. That was when I decided that I wanted to become a pediatrician. I really loved my pediatrician and he was someone that my parents admired. I guess I thought it was cool to be admired and to play with kids all day long. I actually think that this is the spirit that still keeps me going: As a pediatrician I laugh a lot, I play a lot and I interact with children which I really, really enjoy. You know, some people go and take a smoke when they want to take a break. Me, I go to the kids ward and play with the kids when I need a break.

Looking back, I think that I was very lucky to figure out what I wanted to do in my life this early. But then, when I started medical school, I failed my first year. Before that, I was always a very good student. But failing this first year really came as a shock. The good thing is, that it helped me realize two things: First, that I wasn't a genius, which was good to know and second, that I really, really wanted to become a pediatrician. It wasn't just a kid's dream and I realized that it would be horrible if I didn't get the chance to do it. I started to work more and from that moment on, everything went smoothly.

I was very lucky to do a few internships in Saint-Justine in Canada which confirmed to me that the work really was how I had imagined. Then, in my sixth year of medical school I went to Geneva and my boss, Prof. Susanne Suter, asked me if I wanted to come to pediatrics right after medical school. That was a bit unusual at the time, because most people did something else for a year and then came to pediatrics. But of course, I couldn't refuse an offer like that. Then, after some time, Prof. Suter asked me to come to her office again and I was very nervous. She told me that there was an open position in infectious diseases and I agreed to apply to the position. My goal at the time was to open a private practice at some point, but I realized that infectious diseases doesn't really work as a specialty in a private practice. So I worked on building my academic portrait, focused on teaching, which I always liked, and tried to find a way to do research which was more complicated but eventually worked out with the help and guidance of Prof. Didier Pittet. After working with him I went to Pittsburgh and this work really gave me the tools to build up my knowledge. I then came back to Geneva. This was towards the end of the career of Prof. Suter, but when I went to her, she didn't offer me any new position.

Luckily, this was when I met Prof. Claire-Anne Siegrist, who was at that time Professor in vaccinology and immunology and was in the process of building up, little by little, a link with clinical research. It was the perfect person for me to meet at that time. I then became the head of the infectious diseases unit in Geneva. The infectious diseases team slowly built up and I am very proud of the group because they really are superstars, working very well and quickly. As a mentor, I really try to fill the gaps that were missing when I was in training. I try to push my team forward and give them the opportunities they need to reach their goals. I then became the head of general pediatrics in 2017. I didn't really dream about this job before, but it is a truly interesting opportunity and a wonderful challenge for me.

Prof. Frey: I was a little bit less determined at the age of 3 than Klara (laughs). I wasn't very sure of what I should do for a long time, but I always thought that I needed to do something in life that is really worthwhile and that contributes to society. I went to a technical Gymnasium and there, all my colleagues always seemed much brighter than me. They wanted to study at the ETH and wanted to become professors or work in a bank and wanted to become rich and famous. I remember when we had a lecture with the dean and he asked: What is your plan? What do you want to study? And I somehow said that I would like to do something that is useful to society and that I would like to study medicine. But the other guys said: Frey, really? He is too stupid for medicine, forget it. So I was slightly demotivated (laughs). However, it is important to keep a dream and try to achieve it. So I nevertheless started studying medicine and really enjoyed it.

For a long time, I wasn't really sure on what specialty I wanted to focus on. My problem is that I am interested in everything and I cannot focus on something because as soon as

	<p>I get to the next topic, I'm interested in that too. So for me, choosing my specialty was really hard. But I became somehow more and more interested in medicine in the context of low- and middle-income countries. In my last year of my medical studies, I spent some time in Botswana where I particularly enjoyed working with children. So this is when I decided to go into pediatrics. I came back to Switzerland and did one year of research to do an MD in Bern in pediatric pulmonology. There, I had a very motivating professor and learned a lot. On the other hand, this was also when I realized that my scientific skills were limited. We were in the process of developing new techniques to measure lung functioning in small babies and I just didn't have the technical skills to do that. So I decided to do a PhD abroad. I first went to the US and then later to the UK where I did my specialization in pediatric pulmonology and a PhD in biomedical engineering, which was a very novel type of training.</p> <p>I actually wanted to stay in the UK because I really loved the teaching culture. But I was there with my wife and we had a little baby. And it wasn't so easy with the baby in London. So when we had the opportunity to come back to Bern we did and I specialized in pediatric pulmonology. This was one of the first departments in pediatric pulmonology that evolved among the other centers in Switzerland. It was a fantastic opportunity and it was wonderful to have a research group that kept on growing. After a while, I was looking for a more structured Professorship and in 2011 I applied to be elected as a new chair and head of department in the children's hospital in Basel. Here, I am doing two things. I am contributing to the building and maintaining of a new hospital and am also creating an environment that helps young people to develop and improve the quality of care which is an absolutely amazing thing to do.</p>
<p>How do you manage your personal and professional life? Do you have any strategies that have proven to be useful?</p>	<p>Prof. Frey: I think family life is very important. You really have to make sure that your family is a major part of your life because it gives you the safety you need – particularly when you are in a demanding position professionally. My wife and I have both always been working, and I think that our children are very happy. I think when parents are happy, children are happy, whether you work or don't. When I was working in Bern I had to insist that I was able to work 80% when my older daughter was younger. That was not so easy, because no one did that back then. But I think that particularly when the children are small, it is really important to be able to spend time with them. I still feel that it was fantastic to reduce work for that time to really be there when my children grew up.</p> <p>Prof. Posfay-Barbe: I think, first of all you have to realize that depending on the stage of your career, your age and your family situation, things can be very different. There is not one single way of dealing with this at all times of your career. As Urs said, I think that if your children feel that you love your job, they have a higher tolerance level. One of my strategies is that when I am home, I am fully home. I really try to be available and when I say I am going to be there; I am going to be there. I have always made time to go to the milestone things like the ballet recital, even if it wasn't a very convenient time for me.</p> <p>One thing that I would say is: Don't put your own limits too high. Do what is expected of you and don't miss important doors to open. But for the rest, you can always try to find the way that works best for you. There are moments in your career where you have to focus on your family. So in my case, there were years where I didn't go to conferences for a while when the children were small. But there are also times when you can focus on your career and your family is your support network to do so.</p>
<p>What are the specific challenges that you face in pediatrics and what would be your advice for young doctors</p>	<p>Prof. Frey: Pediatrics can be very emotional. Sometimes, you face very difficult and tragic situations. Especially these child-abuse-situations are not easy to handle. And I don't think that it is getting better when you're older. You might become even more sensitive to these things over time because you see all the consequences more clearly. I think the most important thing is that you create an environment or a little network where you can discuss these type of things and where you can kind of debrief these situations. In</p>

<p>starting in the field?</p>	<p>the hospital, we now have these professional networks where we do the debriefing after all of these heavy situations. But it's really important that you actively use them.</p> <p>Prof. Posfay-Barbe: I agree with what Urs said. I also think that Covid-19 opened some eyes regarding the importance of public health. For example, in regards to the increased suicide rate in teenagers and how important it is to take care of children so they can become healthy adults. In pediatrics, you also have a role in public health issues and I think you need to be interested in that. As a pediatrician, you are a primary care physician and you have a role in the interaction with society.</p> <p>Prof. Frey: One other thing is, that you really have to have a very systemic view of thinking. A child never just has an ear problem or a stomach problem but it might have a nutritional problem and a growth problem at the same time. It may actually be bad for the entire family and this might interact with the school and so on. So you always have to keep this kind of systemic view, particularly in the context of a developing human being. This makes our job as pediatricians very beautiful, but also extremely challenging. In order to give the best care possible, it's very important that you develop a team spirit. Particularly when several specialists are involved.</p> <p>Prof. Posfay-Barbe: Another topic that pediatricians have been strong at for a really long time is also the partnership with the patient. We have always worked in a triangle of the child, the parents and the physician. When it comes to that, you have to go to your team to help you deal with parents in case it becomes particularly demanding as is the case with helicopter parents. Even if this challenges you, you have to handle the situation with a focus on the child and on what is best for the child.</p>
<p>What role does ethics play in your daily work and how do you manage to take difficult ethical decisions?</p>	<p>Prof. Frey: Ethics is probably continuously present and you have always some kind of ethical considerations in mind. I think that it's important to have a clear view of that and that some situations cannot be answered by just one person. It's important to know that there are situations in which we have to take difficult decisions and propose them to parents. In the hospital, we typically have clear processes and schemes when it comes to these decisions. Also, we have people from outside with training in ethics who can have an outsider's view on things, which helps taking everything into consideration.</p> <p>Prof. Posfay-Barbe: I think that you have to be very clear with yourself on what is and what isn't ethically sound. And this line can not only give you directions professionally, but also in your personal life. And if you reflect and act on that, you're going to be okay. When situations become challenging always remember that there are groups that can help you and it can help to have a discussion to come to a conclusion. I think that in the end it is important that you stay true to yourself. You have to decide on what is the best for the child and you have to be able to live with what you have decided.</p>