



Technology transfer for academic research
A company of the LifeScience Foundation

ANNUAL REVIEW 2024/2025 — Life Sciences into Business

A large, stylized graphic in the center of the page. It consists of a white circle containing the text "Focus AI" in a bold, red, sans-serif font. This circle is surrounded by a thick, dark red ring. The background of the entire page is a gradient from dark blue on the left to red on the right, overlaid with a network of white lines and dots, resembling a molecular or data network structure.

**Focus
AI**

Committed to transfer

Ascenion is an independent knowledge and technology transfer company that supports 40 European partners with a life-science focus: research institutes, universities, university hospitals and associated institutions.

Together, we are committed to transferring excellent research into profitable applications. We have already launched almost 80 start-ups and more than 30 new products, from which millions of people worldwide are now benefitting.

Our team comprises nearly 40 members of staff at 7 locations with headquarters in Munich. We are interdisciplinary, international and industry experienced. Many of us have a life-science background and experience in start-ups, medium-sized companies, or global concerns.

WE ARE



Technology managers and project developers



Lawyers and negotiation experts



Start-up coaches and equity managers



Analysts and industry liaison managers



Time to act

Looking back over the past year, two things particularly spring to mind.

1. Our work is having an impact. The white paper on standardization that we developed together with TransferAllianz and other partners has generated a huge resonance – in Europe and beyond. The German Association of Medical Faculties (MFT) wants to adopt our recommendations. This shows that we are on the right path – the progress made by brilliant projects from the inventors and start-ups we support only confirms this. We present some of these in this report.

2. We must act to remain effective – right now. Several coinciding developments are currently rocking the foundations of our work. We are observing an imbalance in German start-up activity. Many start-ups are being founded too early and too fast. We currently support at least one new start-up a month from our partners. Gratifying as this may be, we are accompanying just as many insolvencies and liquidations. The number of sound start-ups is stagnating. We have to move away from an incentive-based system that rewards quantity, towards one that promotes quality and maturity.

Internationally we are experiencing a noticeable slowdown in the health sector, not least as a result of unpredictable US policies, but also due to the patent cliff and the difficult financing environment. The economic fallout is real: cost coverage is being questioned, drugs are stuck at borders, licensing royalties go unpaid, financing and exit routes are closing. This is all undermining innovation.

But new opportunities are emerging – through AI, for example. AI will drive the economy, society and innovation and will fundamentally change the way we work. The realm of possibility is immense – at the moment, we do not yet know exactly where we are, nor where the journey will take us. One thing is clear: those who position themselves now and join in shaping developments will prevail. Others will be left by the wayside.

So let's pull together and use our experience and expertise rooted in science and transfer to set the course. Together with business, politics and society we can then shape a future worth living.

We look forward to exchanging ideas!

Dr Christian A. Stein
CEO
Ascenion GmbH

AI transfer: it's only just getting started

AI is already part of everyday life – in research institutes, hospitals and offices. Many are already trying it out: to research a topic, draft text or compile information. Some are enthusiastic, others sceptical. It remains to be seen where the journey will take us.

We at Ascenion are systematically testing the possibilities of AI in technology transfer. Here are our current findings and recommendations.

Start with small, useful tools

Our own first AI tool – a TO generator – has shown us that even with moderate software know-how, it's possible to rapidly create useful tools that save time and deliver high-quality results. Our technology managers can now put together a technology offer in half the time previously required.



Ascenion's TO generator won the Digital & AI Award 2025 conferred by the European technology transfer association, ASTP.

A further application: thanks to AI, we can evaluate and visualize large quantities of raw data from various sources for our clients. This enables detailed market analyses and clinical study evaluations to be produced that could not have been realized in the traditional way – or at least not in an affordable form.

Workflows under human control

From the outset we have created a separate and secure IT environment for our AI work, in which our various AI platforms are linked together. The next step is to combine individual tools into multilevel workflows.

Our focus here is on transparency – internal as well as external. Our clients can see at any point how the results of Ascenion's work arise. And quality control remains in the hands of human experts.

More time for our clients, better screening

These changes mean that the focus of our work is shifting: fewer routine tasks, more IT – and more time for those aspects of tech transfer that can't be automated, above all personal exchanges with scientists and our partners in industry. This could enable us to find and commercialize more transfer projects. There is certainly room for improvement here: our colleagues at Cambridge Enterprise (UK) estimate that 90% of exploitable projects currently go unrecognized.

Our best chance is to set off together on this journey to positively shape the future of technology transfer for the good of all.

Dr Christian A. Stein, Ascenion

New world

But AI will change more than just efficiency. 'We should dare to rethink technology transfer,' says Dr Christian A. Stein. Possibilities include new services and business models, such as an AI-supported platform that offers potential industry partners and investors simple, needs-based access to technologies. Or apps that guide entrepreneurs through the process of founding a start-up, suggest business models and much more. In view of the immense investment into AI being made by Big Tech and public bodies in the USA and China, it will not however be easy here in Germany to develop services and establish them on the market before they become outdated.

The realm of possibilities and challenges is large. Ascenion is therefore counting on the close cooperation of all involved.



AI Code of Conduct for every institute

AI influences many aspects of technology transfer: from the invention process itself to publication and marketing. Here are four questions that an AI Code of Conduct should be able to answer in order to secure patentability and enable transfer in the age of AI.

We are happy to help our partners define a clear framework:

1

How do we avoid losing patentability?

Whoever uses AI for reports, abstracts or prototypes should be cautious: a careless input can become a publication, and end any hope of a patent.

2

How should we deal with training data and models?

Training data and models are a valuable and sometimes an essential part of the business idea. It's important to establish early on whether they can be used and possibly be protected.

3

How do we secure benefits for society while remaining true to our mission?

AI makes completely new applications possible – and poses ethical questions to which we need new answers. Clear positioning and binding processes for clarifying ethical issues are required.

4

How do we organize responsibilities and acquire knowledge?

The technological possibilities are changing rapidly. Every institute and all researchers – regardless of their field – should build and continually develop their AI competence.

AI boosts spin-off momentum

The German start-up scene is also gaining fresh impetus from AI. Even start-ups that are not primarily focused on AI are increasingly expanding their services and tools with the help of intelligent systems – particularly in the area of digital health. The examples of Lucid Genomics, Aptila, dotbase and Recovery Cat demonstrate the tangible benefits this brings for research, patients and healthcare systems.

Shedding light on the dark genome: using AI to fight diagnostic blind spots

For decades, genomic diagnostics focused on just 2% of our DNA – the protein-coding part – leaving the vast ‘dark genome’ largely uncharted. Now, Lucid Genomics, a spin-off from the Max Planck Institute for Molecular Genetics and Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin, is revealing its diagnostic potential.

Lucid
GENOMICS

If you're thinking about founding a company, bring in tech transfer experts early. They become true teammates – helping you navigate key steps of the journey.
Dr Uirá Souto Melo, Lucid Genomics



Lucid Genomics team: Achim Geppert, Dr M-Hossein Moeinzadeh, Dr Uirá Souto Melo (from left to right)

Founded by Uirá Souto Melo and M-Hossein Moeinzadeh, Lucid builds on groundbreaking work by Prof. Dr Stefan Mundlos (Charité) and Prof. Dr Martin Vingron (MPI), who showed that mutations in non-coding DNA can contribute to disease. But analyzing these regions is technically challenging – whole genome sequencing data is vast and noisy, especially with short-read technologies.

Lucid's solution is an AI-driven platform that transforms noisy sequencing data into clear, actionable insights. It denoises data from short-read technologies, enhancing its quality to match that of long-read sequences, and then interprets it using machine learning and a deep genomic knowledge base.

Currently available for research use, the platform is already attracting a growing international customer base. Lucid is also in discussions with major diagnostics players and has initiated the process of regulatory approval. The long-term goal: an in vitro diagnostic device that could one day redefine clinical genomics.

The founding team was supported by Ascenion and Max Planck Innovation, both equity holders.

Unlocking the power of proteomics

Proteomics holds great promise for biomedical research – from understanding disease mechanisms to discovering new biomarkers. Over the past decade, advances in mass spectrometry and software have significantly expanded what's possible, but the field has yet to fully take off – largely because data analysis remains complex and time-consuming.

'We want to change that,' says Vadim Demichev, co-founder of Aptila and head of the Quantitative Proteomics Lab at Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin. 'Our goal is to make proteomics a streamlined, easy to use and cost-effective research tool.'

Vadim Demichev and his team developed DIA-NN, an AI-powered software that helps researchers interpret the vast data from mass spectrometry. It filters noise, identifies proteins and delivers reliable quantification – enabling novel applications of proteomics.

The first free version of DIA-NN was rapidly adopted by researchers worldwide, confirming its scientific value and commercial potential. In early 2025, Aptila launched the commercial version DIA-NN 2.0, now used by major pharma companies. A free academic version remains available.



We had a clear business case from the start. But Ascenion's guidance during company formation has brought real added value.

Justus Grossmann, Aptila



Less bureaucracy, better care

It began with frustration over inflexible hospital information systems (HIS): time spent on documentation in hospitals is growing, and yet crucial information required for optimal treatment is often missing. Andrea Kreichgauer and Jasper Mecklenburg, founders of dotbase, experienced this themselves at the Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin.

Together with their team they have developed a platform that addresses medical need and can be easily adapted when knowledge, procedures or technologies change – in a central workspace without data silos and without any programming knowledge. Their vision: a patient-centred data ecosystem for all those working in the healthcare system that is intuitive to use and demonstrably improves care.

‘Our data model is modular, allowing us to replace existing systems step by step,’ explains Jasper Mecklenburg. In close cooperation with leading clinical teams all over Germany, modules for specific workflows are being developed, for example for breast cancer treatment. Around 10,000 patient pathways are currently recorded by dotbase each quarter, most of these at the Charité.



We appreciate the short communication channels and the open, personal exchange with Ascenion, both as a tech transfer partner and now as an investor.
Jasper Mecklenburg, dotbase

‘Any hospital that wants to rethink their HIS can start with dotbase. It offers classical functions, but in a much more flexible and user-friendly way. At the same time, hospitals can lay the foundation for a digital healthcare system that is patient centred once again,’ says Jasper Mecklenburg.

dotbase was funded by the BIH Digital Health Accelerator and supported by Ascenion during founding.

Hybrid psychiatric care becomes a reality

The transition from inpatient to outpatient care can lead to an interruption in treatment, particularly in severe mental illness. Dr Jakob Kaminski, cofounder of Recovery Cat and psychiatrist and psychotherapist at the Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin has encountered this problem often.



Through our collaboration with Ascenion, we benefit from their strong network and well-founded expertise in technology transfer, enabling us to put our ideas into practice.

Dr Jakob Kaminski, Recovery Cat

Together with an interdisciplinary team, he has therefore developed a platform to facilitate continued therapy. It allows patients and practitioners to follow the progress of treatment together. ‘This close collaboration is crucial for us,’ says Jakob Kaminski. It strengthens patient compliance when they see that their feedback has a real impact – on their self-perception

as well as on the course of treatment. On the basis of the data collected, practitioners can make informed decisions about therapy adjustments such as dose reductions. ‘Without sufficient information and in case of doubt, the higher dose is chosen,’ explains Jakob Kaminski. Feedback has been positive – in a feasibility study the app achieved an impressive usage rate of approximately 80%.

Since the beginning of 2025, the German health insurer Techniker Krankenkasse had been covering the cost of hybrid care with Recovery Cat. ‘We see huge potential – also for other conditions,’ says Kaminski. ‘Hybrid care is a real alternative to the classical approach of simply providing more beds – with big benefits for patients, practitioners and health insurers.’

The team was supported by the BIH Digital Health Accelerator and Ascenion, who negotiated the licence agreements with Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin and the Berlin Institute of Health, and holds shares in the start-up.

Participations in 2024

SEVEN NEW SPIN-OFF PARTICIPATIONS



Aptila Biotech
Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin
AI-supported analysis software for proteomics mass spectrometry data



MetaImmune Therapeutics
Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin, Berlin Institute of Health
Development of an alternative to cortisone with few side effects



dotbase
Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin, Berlin Institute of Health
No-code platform for medical workflows



MyxoTech
Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research
Preclinical contract research organization offering drug discovery services with an exceptional compound library



EBViously
Helmholtz Munich
Therapy / Novel vaccines against the Epstein-Barr virus



tcbalance Biopharmaceuticals
Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin, Berlin Institute of Health
Modular technology platform for generating and applying innovative regulatory T cell products for various immune diseases



Lucid Genomics
Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin
Mining of previously undiscovered parts of human DNA to revolutionize healthcare through AI-powered solutions

37 SPIN-OFF PARTICIPATIONS IN ASCENION’S INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO

CHARITÉ				BIH Berlin Institute of Health			HELMHOLTZ MUNICH			HELMHOLTZ MUNICH	HELMHOLTZ MUNICH
aigistics				LIMAA			DERMAINGOTIX			UFZ	MHH
APTILA				TOMADY			iTheraMedical			HELMHOLTZ Zentrum für Infektionsforschung	MHH
BODYCLOCK				Nephrolyx			medigene			ISODETECT	Zelltechs
dotbase				POROUS			EXTREMUM			photonion	
metaimmune therapeutics				RECOVERYCAT							
MAX DELBRÜCK CENTER				HZI			HZI			MHH	Extern / Licence for Shares
BERLIN CURES				CAPTAIN CELL			HepaRegeniX			LIV	Bendor
OMEOS				Leopard Biosciences			Allo genetics			PROVIREX	
TRYPTO THERAPEUTICS				MYXO TECH							

2024 IN FIGURES

PARTNERS IN SCIENCE



24

research institutes, universities
and university hospitals

12

of which are endowing members
of the LifeScience Foundation

122

invention disclosures assessed

52

patent applications managed

860

patent families and research
materials managed in total

PROTECTING IDEAS



49

technologies supported
in the project
development phase

EUR 4.88m

in funding acquired for
translation

TRANSLATION



CARMA FUND

600+

start-ups evaluated

200+

research projects evaluated

17

investments in start-ups
made, including in companies
from Ascenion's portfolio

(all figures of CARMA FUND
by mid-2025)

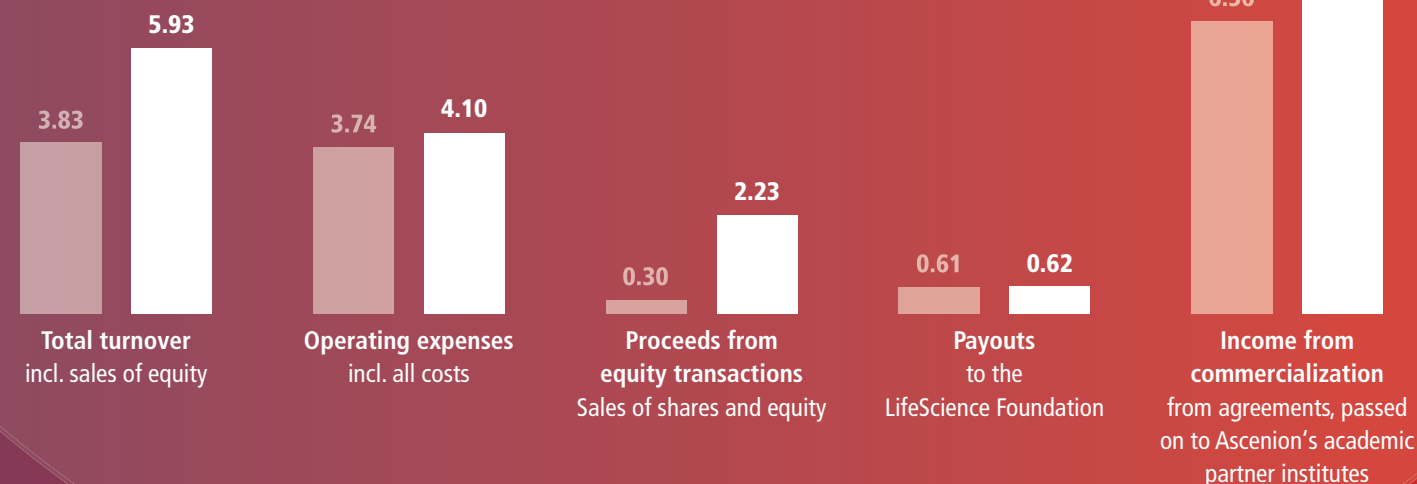
TRAINING

18

training courses held
for scientists on topics
in knowledge and
technology transfer

FINANCIAL RESULTS 2023/2024

Figures in m EUR



LICENCES & COOPERATIONS



34

revenue-generating agreements closed with industry partners

70

further agreements relating to commercial exploitation supported

EUR 7.36m

in revenue for our partner institutes through agreements supported by us:
including licences, options and sales of materials

START-UPS



37

start-up projects accompanied by us

EUR 51.67m

in venture capital investment for
7 portfolio companies

7

company foundations and participations



CLINICAL MILESTONES

8

new products on the market:

- IVD kit for renal function
- Clinical contract research service
- Patient-specific phantoms for CT examinations
- EVA ventilator for COPD patients
- No-code platform for medical workflows
- AI tool for analysing the entire genome
- Fully automated 3D histopathology platform
- Digital healthcare for pregnant women

Licences & cooperations

Ascenion concluded a total of 34 revenue-generating agreements with industry partners in 2024 – including an innovative home ventilator that provides significant relief for COPD patients, and the CRISPR-StAR technology for precise genetic analyses in cancer research.

Exclusive licence from the Research Center Borstel to pulmedix COPD patients can breathe again – thanks to ‘eva’

The home ventilator ‘eva’ was approved mid-2024 under the EU’s new Medical Device Regulation (MDR), followed in November by its inclusion in the Technical Aids Register of medical devices reimbursed by the German health insurance companies. Demand for the ventilator is high: nearly 200 devices were sold by the end of the year alone.

‘We have solved a central problem of conventional ventilator technology,’ says Dr Stephan Rüller, who developed the new concept together with Susanne Greve at the Research Center Borstel – Leibniz Lung Center (FZB). Conventional devices use high pressure to supply COPD patients with air despite their restricted airways – but this compresses the airways further, impeding exhalation. The result: lung hyperinflation, poor sleep and breathlessness in the morning.

‘We took our inspiration from the breathing technique naturally employed by people experiencing breathlessness: they press their lips together lightly while exhaling, in order to create a stabilizing counterpressure,’ explains Stephan Rüller. This keeps the airways open, and allows deeper exhalation. This is exactly what ‘eva’ does – while automatically adapting to the patient’s individual breathing rhythm. Patients wake up refreshed and ready to start their day.

Ascenion has accompanied all those involved over the years – including through some difficult phases such as the tightening of EU regulations. This persistence has paid off, particularly for those living with COPD. The licensing partner pulmedix is driving the market launch in Germany and Austria together with its sales partner nova:med. Furthermore, ‘eva’ is already available in Italy and Switzerland, and cooperation requests from the Middle East and Asia are being processed.



The home ventilator ‘eva’ improves the quality of life of COPD patients.

With a high level of commitment, medical and technical expertise, and considerable competence, Ascenion guided our project through all stages of patent and licensing law, navigating around numerous hurdles and pitfalls along the way.
Dr Stephan Rüller, inventor



Non-exclusive licence from IMBA to ViVerita IMBA’s CRISPR technology sets new standards in cancer research

Classical CRISPR screens enable comprehensive gene function analyses *in vitro*. Their meaningfulness is nevertheless limited, as they do not fully reflect the complexity of living organisms. Reliable and reproducible *in vivo* screening often fails, because the effects of genetic changes are very weak due to insufficient representation of the transduced sgRNAs. These meagre effects are further eclipsed by additional internal and external interferences and clonal distortions.

The CRISPR-StAR technology developed by Dr Ulrich Elling and his team at the IMBA – Institute of Molecular Biotechnology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna has overcome this obstacle. It is based on Cre-inducible expression vectors and single-cell barcoding for the sgRNAs used in CRISPR screens. Data published in Nature Biotechnology show that precise and controlled gene editing is possible, guaranteeing a definite distinction between apparent and real genetic hits. ‘This enables us to gain reliable insights into the genetic dependencies underlying therapeutic challenges such as therapy-resistant melanoma,’ explains Ulrich Elling.

With support from Ascenion, the technology has been licensed to the US company ViVerita Therapeutics. The focus is on identifying new target structures for cancer therapy. ViVerita’s Vienna subsidiary, headed by Ulrich Elling, also provides technological expertise and services to biopharmaceutical partners. ‘Our aim is to fully exploit the potential of this technology for the development of innovative therapies,’ says Dr Elling.

With support from Ascenion, the technology has been licensed to the US company ViVerita Therapeutics. The focus is on identifying new target structures for cancer therapy.

BioVaria 2025

BioVaria brings exactly the right people together. I value the quality of the start-up pitches, the scientific contributions and the useful overview of life-science innovations. The setting lends itself to in-depth conversations.

Dr Laura Pedroza, High-Tech Gründerfonds

Each spring, BioVaria in Munich provides the perfect forum for European technology transfer experts, scientists and entrepreneurs, as well as investors and representatives of the global biotech and pharma industries. Their common goal: translating innovations from academic life-science research into application.

Startup Pitch & Partner Awards 2025

This year's Startup Pitch & Partner Awards went to Green Elephant Biotech (in the 'Rising' category) and Citrapeutics (in the 'Emerging' category). Green Elephant Biotech from Gießen has developed CellScrew®, a novel cell culture system for efficient, sustainable and easily scalable production of cell and gene therapies, vaccines and other biologics. Citrapeutics, a spin-off project from the Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research, is working on novel immunotherapies against cancer that inhibit the enzyme ACOD1.

WHAT THE AWARD WINNERS SAY

BioVaria offers exactly the stage that young biotech companies need: close to science, practice, and industry. This award confirms that adherent cell production needs to be more efficient and more scalable – and that we are on the right track with our platform.

Dr Joel Eichmann, Green Elephant Biotech

Just last year we were attendees at BioVaria – now we're the winning team. We owe this to our colleagues at the Helmholtz Center for Infection Research, the spin-off program Helmholtz Enterprise, and Ascenion. The award and the new contacts bring us closer to our goal of bringing ACOD1 inhibitors to clinical application.

Dr Nikolas Chalkias & Prof. Frank Pessler, Citrapeutics

BIOVARIA 2025 in figures

- 320** participants from industry, venture capital companies, science and technology transfer
- 11** knowledge and technology transfer organizations as BioVaria partners
- 37** research institutes, universities and university hospitals from all over Europe
- 71** licensable projects, potential therapeutics, diagnostics and platform technologies
- 29** 10-minute technology presentations
- 10** start-ups, five each in the categories 'Emerging' and 'Rising'
- 9** early-stage innovation presentations from the GO-Bio-*initial*- and ForTra programmes

Save the date:
BioVaria 2026
27–28 April 2026
in Munich

GO-Bio *initial*: the funding programme for efficient transfer

Ascenion's team will continue to support you with your applications over the next three years and, if desired, will accompany your projects through the conceptual and feasibility phases. In parallel, we offer various training and networking opportunities through our Digital Technology Transfer Academy. Short videos on our website present important aspects of technology transfer in a nutshell, and our new roadmap provides plenty of useful information and links for start-up founders. It's worth taking a look!



DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY
TRANSFER ACADEMY



CONCEPTUAL PHASE 2024

25 applications supported
13 projects from
7 institutes funded



FEASIBILITY PHASE 2024

6 applications from teams at our
partner institutes submitted
3 invitations to pitch,
1 project launched



DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER ACADEMY

4 interactive events
6 new tutorial videos online
1 roadmap online

With funding from the:



Federal Ministry
of Research, Technology
and Space

Ascenion's Life Science Digital Hub project is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space as part of the GO-Bio *initial* programme. Funding reference since November 2024: 03LW0585

Vaccinated once – protected for life

Vaccines work – but usually not for ever. Boosters are expensive, time-consuming, and are often met with low acceptance. VIVA-VEK wants to change this.

The project brings together technologies from the Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research (HZI) and the Max Delbrück Center for Molecular Medicine, both part of the Helmholtz Association. It is being developed by Dr Henning Jacobsen, Prof. Luka Cicin-Sain, Prof. Kathrin de la Rosa and their team at the HZI and at the Centre for Individualised Infection Medicine (CiIM*).

Their approach is based on a mouse cytomegalovirus (MCMV) vector: it remains in the body for life, without the need for boosters. And it is safe: as a mouse virus, it cannot replicate in the human body. Furthermore, the vector can carry several antigens simultaneously, allowing the production of combination vaccines.

New technological approaches used by the team complement the vector perfectly: antigens are modified so that they can't interact with the body's own receptors. This allows the creation of safer and more potent vaccines that give long-lasting protection.

Studies to date show that MCMV-based immunization lasts at least 10 times longer than immunization with conventional vaccines. Preclinical validation of the lead vaccine against the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is underway in cooperation with the German Primate Center – Leibniz Institute for Primate Research, and a comparative study with an existing vaccine will begin at the end of 2025.

From the beginning, the inventors have worked in close contact with industry, regulatory authorities and Ascenion, the latter having supported the team regarding patenting and market studies. 'We're learning what investors expect and how to think in terms of milestones,' says Henning Jacobsen. 'Tech-transfer helps us with this, and funding programmes such as GO-Bio *initial* allow us to buy in the required expertise. This is extremely valuable.'



*The CiIM is a joint initiative of the Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research (HZI) in Braunschweig and the Hannover Medical School (MHH).

LifeScience Foundation for the Promotion of Science and Research



Change on the Board

Ascenion and the LifeScience Foundation sincerely thank Dr Manfred Baier for the excellent collaboration and his dedicated support. 'The Foundation and Ascenion have shown once more the value of scientific research to society – and that patents and professional technology transfer help to finance tomorrow's research,' says Manfred Baier. Together with long-standing Board member Dr Ronald Mertz, he has brought this mission to life – through cooperation based on trust, and a pragmatic approach with minimal bureaucracy.

A warm welcome goes to our new Board member Dr Jörn Erselius who, as long-standing CEO of Max Planck Innovation and member of ASTP, has shaped the national and international technology transfer landscape for over 35 years. 'I value Ascenion – both professionally and personally – and very much look forward to bringing my experience to the LifeScience Foundation,' says Jörn Erselius. As a member of the Board, he sees his role in further developing framework conditions for technology transfer in Germany.



We need to strengthen our jointly developed, internationally aligned standards at a national level – rather than discussing German go-it-alone strategies that could destroy the basis of successful transfer.
Dr Jörn Erselius, LifeScience Foundation

Our endowment is a clear commitment to transfer and to the endowment model that gives us access to the required expertise and allows us to participate optimally in financial returns.
Prof. Dr Eicke Latz, German Rheumatology Research Center

The German Rheumatology Research Center joins the Foundation

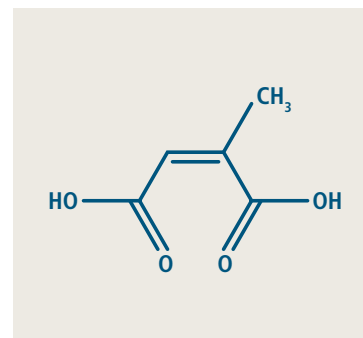
The LifeScience Foundation is delighted to welcome the German Rheumatology Research Center as a new endowing member. The institute is a member of the Leibniz Association and was previously one of Ascenion's partner institutes. The Foundation currently has 13 endowing members.

EUR 297,500 for research grants

The grants supplied by the Foundation come mainly from revenue generated by Ascenion's business activities. Ascenion distributes most of its surplus profits and proceeds from the sale of equity to the Foundation, which in turn makes these funds available to the endowing members for research and translation projects. In 2024, a total of EUR 297,500 was made available to five projects at two institutes. We introduce two of these projects here.

Small molecule with big potential

A derivative of citraconic acid (a naturally occurring substance in the human body) is being evaluated for cancer immunotherapy by Prof. Frank Pessler and his team at TWINCORE – Centre for Experimental and Clinical Infection Research*. The molecule inhibits the ACOD1 enzyme, producing simultaneous tumour-inhibiting and immunostimulatory effects. In contrast to current checkpoint inhibitors – mostly antibodies – the drug candidate is inexpensive to produce and can be orally administered. 'Such a simple active substance with just five carbon atoms that can be taken as a tablet and reliably reaches tumour tissue – this is an unusually clear solution in a complex field,' says Frank Pessler.



We're looking forward to continuing our partnership with Ascenion – they have made a great deal possible.
Prof. Frank Pessler, Twincore

Thanks to funding from Helmholtz Enterprise and the LifeScience Foundation, the team were able to finance studies that demonstrate effectiveness in a mouse model. The potential is considerable: in all common types of cancer there are patient groups with high ACOD1 expression.

The enzyme is not only a target structure, but also an easily detectable biomarker. This allows patients to be identified who would particularly benefit from the therapy. Furthermore, the lead candidate CITR-01 can be labelled with fluorine-18, allowing the course of therapy to be monitored using PET imaging. This is extremely advantageous for the further development of the drug. The approach is being tested as monotherapy and in combination with checkpoint inhibitors that so far have only been effective in about 40% of cases.

Prof. Frank Pessler and his colleagues Dr Fakhar Waqas and Dr Nikolas Chalkias are planning to launch their start-up, Citrapeutics, by the end of this year.

New antibiotics against resistant bacteria

When conventional antibiotics stop working, the most trivial of infections can become dangerous. 'We therefore urgently need new drugs that address hitherto untargeted structures,' says Prof. Anna Hirsch, who is working to achieve this with her team at the Helmholtz Institute for Pharmaceutical Research Saarland (HIPS) – part of the Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research (HZI) and established in cooperation with Saarland University.

The focus of Anna Hirsch's research is the protein DnaN, identified by her colleague Prof. Rolf Müller at HIPS. It's an attractive target because it is highly conserved in bacteria and not yet addressed by an approved antibiotic. Using virtual screening and medicinal chemistry methods, Project Manager Dr Walid Elgaher has discovered several small molecules which the team are currently optimizing as possible drug candidates.

'We're really excited about the potential of this target structure and the close, interdisciplinary cooperation between the teams at HIPS, the HZI and Saarland University,' says Anna Hirsch. Over the years, a valuable platform of know-how, assays and technologies has been established that enables a variety of approaches, and that has already awakened the interest of biotech companies.



Prof. Anna Hirsch and Dr Walid Elgaher

We believe in this approach and are looking forward to exploring further avenues towards application together with Ascenion.
Prof. Anna Hirsch, HIPS Saarbrücken

Partners

We build on long-term, personal relationships in science and business – especially in this fast-paced, digital world. This enables us to connect the right people and get innovations and start-ups off the ground.

25 academic partners were supported by Ascenion in 2024 as part of long-standing cooperations, including research institutes of the Helmholtz and Leibniz Associations, universities, university hospitals and translational institutes, predominantly in Germany and Austria. We have also accompanied selected transfer projects worldwide.

2,000 industrial representatives, investors and business angels make up our business network, forming the basis for the successful marketing of inventions and investment opportunities. We give inventors and spin-offs at our partner institutes access to this network, helping them find the right development partners, licensees, investors and experts.

HELMHOLTZ

Helmholtz Association

- DZNE, German Center for Neurodegenerative Diseases
- HZDR, Helmholtz-Zentrum Dresden-Rossendorf
- HZI, Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research
- Helmholtz Zentrum München, German Research Center for Environmental Health
- MDC, Max Delbrück Center for Molecular Medicine in the Helmholtz Association



Leibniz Association

- ATB, Leibniz Institute for Agricultural Engineering and Bioeconomy
- DIfE, German Institute of Human Nutrition Potsdam-Rehbruecke
- DPZ, German Primate Center – Leibniz Institute for Primate Research
- FLI, Fritz Lipmann Institute – Leibniz Institute on Aging
- FZB, Research Center Borstel – Leibniz Lung Center
- HKI, Hans Knöll Institute – Leibniz Institute for Natural Product Research and Infection Biology
- LIN, Leibniz Institute for Neurobiology Magdeburg
- LIV, Leibniz Institute of Virology



Universities, university hospitals and further partner institutes

- CAU, Kiel University with University Hospital Schleswig-Holstein
- Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin
- MHH, Hannover Medical School
- MUI, Medical University of Innsbruck
- University of Lübeck with University Hospital Schleswig-Holstein
- ForTra GgmbH für Forschungstransfer der Else Kröner-Fresenius-Stiftung
- FBN, Research Institute for Farm Animal Biology
- IMB, Institute of Molecular Biology
- IMBA, Institute of Molecular Biotechnology
- Klaus Rajewsky Foundation
- LIFE & BRAIN
- TWINCORE, Centre for Experimental and Clinical Infection Research

Endowing institutes of the LifeScience Foundation are highlighted.

Workshops & training

Technology transfer can only succeed through teamwork. We therefore work in close worldwide cooperation with our colleagues to learn and develop – and to share our knowledge and experience with researchers and start-up teams in various interactive formats.

For tech transfer professionals: inspiring discussions and valuable insights

Each year Ascenion invites colleagues exclusively from its partner institutes to share experiences and discuss current developments in technology transfer. This year's focus was on the standard conditions for spin-offs jointly developed with the Charité, as well as the challenges faced when commercializing software-based inventions. Other fascinating topics included how to deal with insolvent licensing partners and the 'DNA' of MTAs and CDAs. In an informal atmosphere, the participants enjoyed intense discussions based on their own practical experiences and went away with many valuable insights.

An excellent event: exactly the right topics, professional presentations, and valuable knowledge to be gained – not to mention a great opportunity to network with colleagues from other institutes. I'm already looking forward to the next knowledge and technology transfer workshop.

Martina Galler, University of Lübeck

For start-up teams: understanding markets and customers

Ascenion has accompanied more than 150 spin-off projects and is happy to pass on this experience to other start-ups. The team also supports MAX!mize – the Max Planck Society's start-up incubation programme – with three consecutive modules. The programme has been successfully implemented by Max Planck Innovation since 2022.

The emphasis is on in-depth analysis of the market and customer base. Participants learn how to develop informed market and competition analyses, and which methods can help to systematically evaluate customer needs: e.g. personas, value proposition and customer journey. The workshops live from their large practical component: the teams apply the concepts directly to their own start-up project, engage in discussions and decide what steps to take next, e.g. interviews with potential customers or stakeholders, in order to understand the real-world need.

It's amazing to see how the teams sharpen their perspective and develop their ideas over the course of the MAX!mize programme.
Dr Rebekka Müller, Ascenion



Certification

Ascenion is certified for its quality management in accordance with the European standard DIN EN ISO 9001:2015. The certification comprises the areas of consulting, evaluation and support for start-ups in life-science technology transfer, and also equity management.



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Imprint:

This report is published annually by Ascenion.
Ascenion GmbH, Herzogstr. 64, 80803 München, Germany
Represented by Dr. Christian A. Stein (CEO)
Editor: Stanislava Zollner (Corporate Communication)
Register Court: Amtsgericht München HRB 118236
VAT Identification Number: DE 812299325
Pictures: Title: iStock.com/berya113; p. 2, 3: Ascenion; p. 4-7: iStock.com/berya113;
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