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SWISS HEPATITIS

# ANNUAL REPORT 2020



# FOREWORD BY THE PRESIDENT

## STOP AND GO

Swiss Hepatitis' activities were considerably restricted and slowed down by the Corona pandemic. The ongoing projects could not all be implemented and further developed as planned and had partly to be paused during the lockdowns. Furthermore, the health authorities at cantonal and national level had to devote all their resources to fighting the pandemic, which brought these collaborations to a standstill.

Nevertheless, Swiss Hepatitis was able to achieve some important goals. First and foremost, a decisive breakthrough was achieved at the political level with the acceptance of the Müller motion by parliament. And with the HIV/hepatitis elimination roadmap that we developed together with the Federal Commission for Issues relating to Sexually Transmitted Infections (CFIST) an important basis for the new national programme was created in parallel.

This milestone forms the basis for achieving our goals of eliminating

viral hepatitis by 2030. But now Swiss Hepatitis is challenged even more, because the decisive factor will be how this parliamentary decision is implemented and how the roadmap is integrated into the new strategy. We will have to continue to voice our concerns at all levels so that hepatitis B and C will receive the necessary attention.

**PD Dr. med. Philip Bruggmann,  
President Swiss Hepatitis**



## POLITIK

# When will the national programme arrive?

**This summer, the motion by Council of States member Damian Müller that the elimination of viral hepatitis should be part of a national programme to combat sexually transmitted and blood-borne diseases was adopted by the National Council as the second chamber. This motion is therefore binding.**

The motion was launched by health politicians because the current national programme on HIV and sexually transmitted infectious diseases expires in 2021. This is an

opportunity to integrate elimination targets for HIV and viral hepatitis into the new programme, which is planned to be implemented in 2022. New infections, secondary diseases and mortality rates are to be reduced to zero. The World Health Organisation (WHO) also considers the elimination of these infectious diseases by 2030 to be realistic at the global level.

At the same time, the Federal Commission for Issues relating to Sexu-



Foto: Hansjörg Keller / Unsplash

ally Transmitted Infections (CFIST) also drew up a roadmap for the elimination of HIV and viral hepatitis at the end of 2019 in collaboration with experts from the Swiss Hepatitis Strategy. From our point of view, this document is an important basis for the programme.

However, because of Corona, the Federal Office of Public Health FOPH has suspended all work on the national programme. It is currently unclear when this work can be resumed. The current programme, which has already been extended once for four years, will probably be

extended again. This is unfortunate, as the programme was developed more than ten years ago, when the world still looked different with regard to HIV and hepatitis: There was no effective therapy for hepatitis C, nor was there any talk of pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV, which is so effective in prevention.

With all due understanding for the great burden placed on our health authorities by the pandemic, we should not miss out on opportunities that are available to us for tackling other infectious diseases.

*„The elimination roadmap is an important basis for the national HIV/hepatitis programme.“*

## SYMPOSIUM

# Elimination: 10 years to go!

**In the midst of the second wave of the corona pandemic, the Swiss Hepatitis Symposium 2021 "Elimination – 10 years to go!" took place as an online-only event. At the symposium we reflected on how we can improve the data situation in Switzerland. And what policymakers need in order to make the right decisions – based on evidence – in the interest of public health.**

In 2020, the first milestones of the elimination targets for viral hepatitis were set. The theme was therefore also to shed light on the milestones.

Swiss Hepatitis President **Philip Bruggmann** presented the current status. For many of the milestones, there are only estimates, outdated data or no data at all. For example, there is a study that shows that mortality due to viral hepatitis affects 200 people per year. But this is from 2017, this data is not collected on a regular basis. We are, so to speak, flying blind.

**Francesco Negro**, Professor of Hepatology, gave an update on hepatitis B in Switzerland. Morbidity is still high. The main countries with

a high prevalence of hepatitis B are in the regions of sub-Saharan Africa and South-East Asia. Hepatitis B is therefore also strongly linked to migration. While vaccination programmes are a success story, there is little encouraging things to report in terms of improved therapies.

**Corina Wirth** from the Swiss Society for Public Health presented the «Data Manifesto». The manifesto pleads for more complete data that is linkable, comparable, available and complete.

**Mark Witschi** from the Federal Office of Public Health showed the digitalisation plans of the office for data collection. Today, data on the health situation is lacking at many levels.

The evaluation by medical student **Simone Temperli** for Swisstransplant was exciting. As part of her dissertation, she evaluated how many organ donors and how many organ recipients as well as persons on the waiting list had HCV antibodies and/or HCV RNA.

Fortunately, the proportion of people who need a liver transplant due to hepatitis C is decreasing. However, despite the availability of a cure, there are still people who need a liver transplant.

Interesting figures on mortality were presented by PHD candidate **Frédérique Lachmann** from the University of Zurich. She wants to find out how many people who died in the last few years in the University Hospital Zurich had chronic hepatitis B or C. This will be used to make projections on mortality. The results are preliminary and will be published soon.

Epidemiologist **Arnaud Chiolerio** from the University of Fribourg also pleaded for a strengthening of the surveillance system because data do not speak for themselves. In order for them to serve as a basis for evidence-based decisions in public health, good surveillance systems are needed.

Political scientist **Julia Kind** also explained that data «do not speak for themselves» and that more is needed for facts to become policy decisions. She analysed the agenda-setting of hepatitis C by conducting

numerous interviews with experts. Her conclusion: It took active work behind the scenes and a so-called policy window to get hepatitis C onto the health policy agenda. Experts and representatives of those affected succeeded thanks to a lot of advocacy work and thanks to the prospect of a new national HIV and hepatitis programme in Switzerland.

Switzerland's «highest scientist», **Marcel Tanner**, President of the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences and the Federal Commission for Issues relating to Sexually Transmitted Infections (CFIST), closed the conference. He showed how the elimination of HIV and viral hepatitis can be advanced in a pragmatic way, in line with a roadmap that was drawn up by the CFIST under his lead.

As last year, the Swiss Association for Public Health and Swiss Hepatitis jointly organised the symposium.

The presentations can be viewed online at [hepatitis-switzerland.ch](http://hepatitis-switzerland.ch) and on our Youtube channel.

# Communication

## a. Nobel Prize

The awarding of the Nobel Prize for Medicine to the three discoverers of the hepatitis C virus, Harvey J. Alter, Michael Houghton and Charles M. Rice in October 2020, brought viral hepatitis into the public eye for a moment. It was an unexpected gift, but all the more welcome. Thanks to the researchers' work, hepatitis C is now curable, some 40 years later. Together with the Swiss Society for Public Health, Swiss Hepatitis published a media release and gave several interviews.

**Radio SRF, 10.10.2020:** Nobel Prize in Medicine for the discovery of the hepatitis C virus, interview with Philip Bruggmann.

**Radio RTS, 06.10.2020:** Triple Prix Nobel de médecine pour la découverte du virus de l'hépatite C, interview with Francesco Negro.

We hope to use this momentum to raise awareness among public health and political decision-makers for the need for targeted control measures in the future.

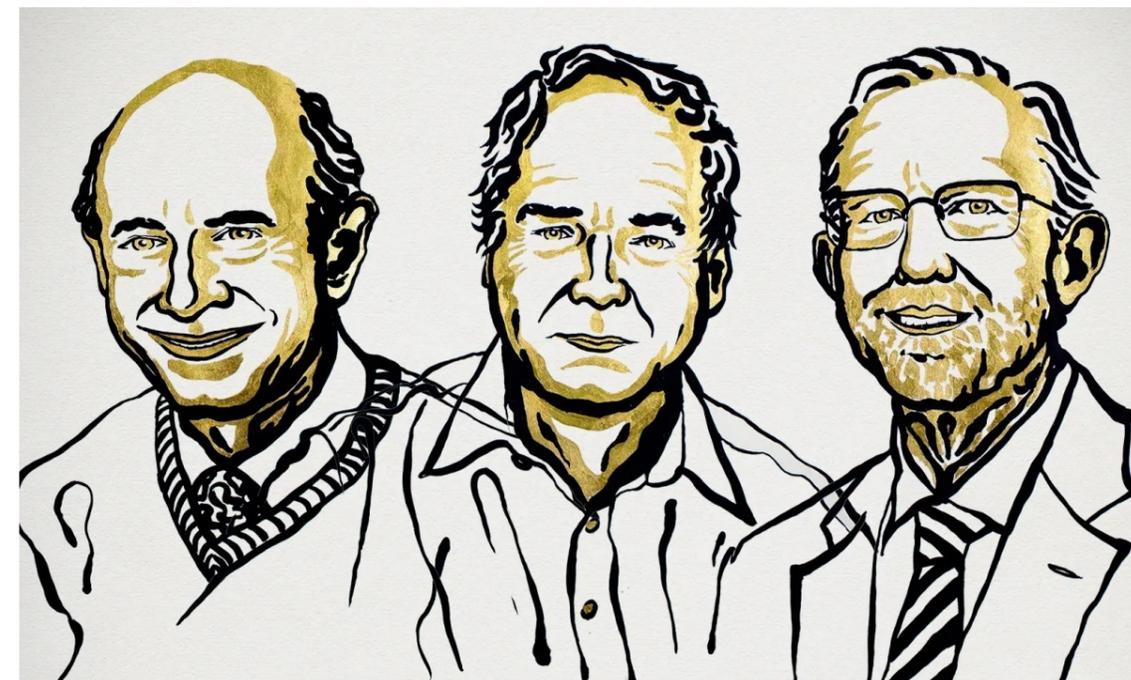


Illustration: Niklas Elmahed / The Nobel Prize

The three discoverers of the hepatitis C virus: Harvey J. Alter, Michael Houghton and Charles M. Rice

## **b. Website: Relaunch**

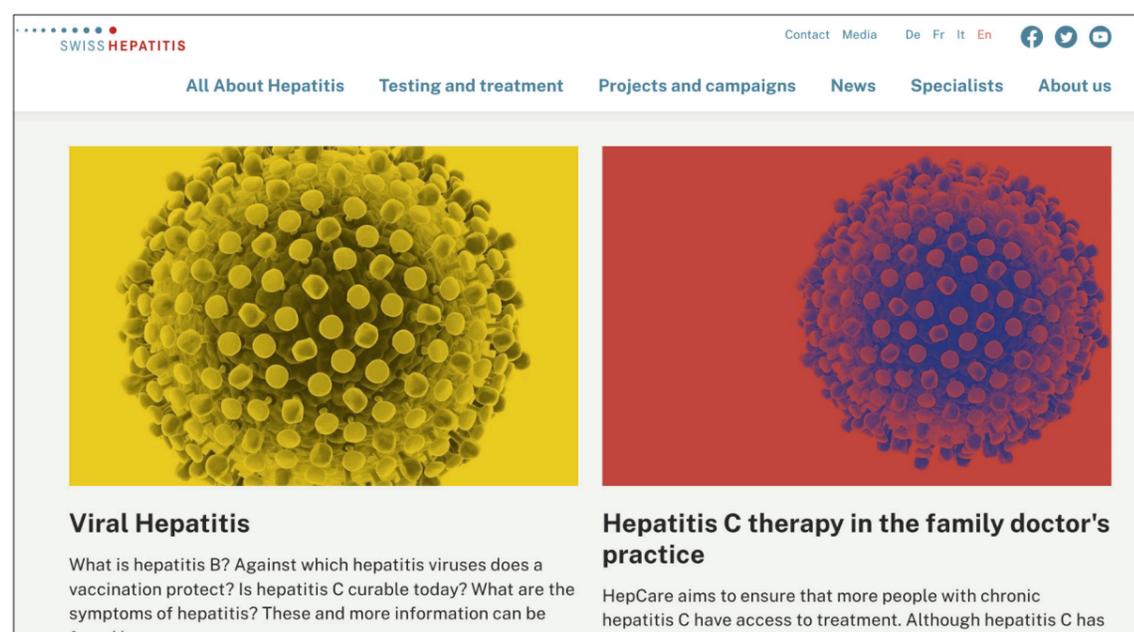
Hepatitis-switzerland.ch has received a «facelift». With a fresh new design, updated content and clear user guidance, we hope to be able to inform the public even better about viral hepatitis in the future.

On our websites hepatitis-switzerland.ch, hepcare.ch, hepcheck.ch and shipp.ch, we recorded a total of around 60,000 users in 2020, who made a total of 163,000 page views. Through active management of our Facebook channel and a follower campaign, we were able to increase the number of subscribers by 350 to 900.

## **c. Campaign**

From September to October 2020, we ran another wave of the «Hepatitis C is deadly, but curable» campaign. The campaign was created in 2019 and had achieved excellent values. For this reason, the animated visuals, which were created specifically for online channels, were retained. However, slight optimisations were made: Only the subject with the messages that had performed best was played out.

Furthermore, the campaign specifically addressed the Italian community in German- and French-speaking Switzerland. This accompanied the newly launched Bel Paese project (see project des-



The website hepatitis-switzerland.ch with a fresh design and updated content is online.

cription under «Flagship projects»). This is because the group of first-generation migrants from Italy is about four times more likely to be affected by hepatitis C than the average population.

Due to the Corona pandemic, we relied almost exclusively on online channels and did without accompanying street campaigns as in 2019. However, we again sent around 15,000 flyers and posters to treatment and testing centres.

The campaign ran in all language regions and in the three national languages German, French and Italian.



Our campaign brings «Good News».

## **d. Publications: Hepatitis C brochure now in French**

The new brochure on hepatitis C published in 2019 is now also available in French. With a fresh layout, up-to-date information and important links and addresses, it informs people with chronic hepatitis C and their relatives as well as experts and the interested public about the most important questions and answers in respect to hepatitis C.

Our print products are still in great demand. In 2020, a total of 483 brochures «Hepatitis B – 50 questions and answers» and 709 brochures «Hepatitis C – the most important questions and answers» were ordered.

All brochures can be obtained free of charge from the shop of our partner organisation the Swiss AIDS Federation. [www.shop.aids.ch](http://www.shop.aids.ch).

# Flagship Projects

## Study HCV Screening Strategies

The study «HCV Screening Strategies» aims to find out which testing strategies for viral hepatitis are most efficient and best accepted by patients and general practitioners (GPs). First GPs in Berne have already tested different screening strategies, other practices in Zurich will follow. Results should be by the end of 2021.

## HepCare – Hepatitis C therapy with the primary care provider

Corona also had an impact on our project with the GPs. Nevertheless, we were able to achieve a lot. With HepCare we were present in several quality circles of our partner network mediX. Furthermore, we presented at two hospitals, were able to organise a mailing in the canton of Zurich to psychiatrists and we published several articles.

Since the end of 2019, Christophe Bösiger has been working on setting up HepCare in French-speaking Switzerland, with interruptions due to Corona. With success: the

hepatology department of the CHUV in Lausanne is a partner. File consultations can be handled via their specialists. Together with Erika Castro's «Clinique virtuelle» project, we are now working on providing training on hepatitis C for primary care providers. We were also able to establish a partnership in the canton of Neuchâtel. First presentations in quality circles are planned for 2021.

## Follow-up care for hepatitis C patients

We were able to draft recommendations on follow-up care with a group of authors consisting of medical professionals and patients. The article was published in the Swiss Medical Forum in March 2021.

## Swiss HepFree in Prisons Programme SHiPP

Our prison project suffered some setbacks because of Corona. However, we have used the time to establish further contacts with prisons, prepare submissions, finalise the basic documents and

launch a website. In 2021, we want to implement some test and therapy activities in prisons with new momentum. For more information, see shipp.ch.

## Bel Paese

Our youngest child is the flagship project «Bel Paese». It targets the group of first-generation migrants from Italy over the age of 60. According to figures from the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) reporting system, this population group is affected by hepatitis C at an above-average rate. Non-sterile paramedical vitamin and nutrient injection practices in the country of origin are suspected as probable source of infection. Since the disease often progresses insidiously over years and decades and does not show any clear symptoms (fatigue, impaired performance), many from this population group are still not diagnosed and treated.

We plan to reach out to the community directly through their GPs as well as through organisations. The «Bel Paese» project aims reach first-generation migrants from Italy through targeted awareness-raising among this population group and through their GPs.

In this way, hepatitis C can be eliminated in this community.

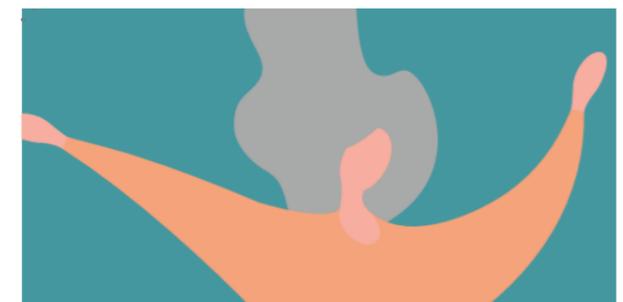
Since September 2019, Erminia Gagliotta is working in a 10-percent position to set up this project.

A first testimonial from a cured patient has reached us. L.F. (76), living in Rorschacherberg SG, was cured of hepatitis C. He has the following hopeful message for his compatriots:

**«Carissimi tutti, il mio consiglio: fate un controllo, fatevi curare. La vita appartiene a noi e viverla in modo sano è bello.»**

«My dear ones, my advice : get tested, get treated. Life is ours and living it in a healthy way is beautiful.»

With this in mind, we will take this message out to the community.



# Thank you

Our sincere thanks go to the donors and sponsors who financially support our activities and projects. Namely, in 2020 these were

- Abbvie
- Swiss AIDS Federation
- Arud Center for Addiction Medicine
- Biotest (Schweiz) AG
- Federal Office of Public Health FOPH
- Gesundheitsdirektion Kanton Zürich
- Gilead Sciences Switzerland Sàrl
- medica medizinische Laboratorien, Zürich
- Roche Diagnostics (Schweiz) AG
- Swiss Association for the Study of the Liver SASL

Our sincere thanks also go to foundations and institutions that support us and do not wish to be named. Without this commitment, our work would not be possible.

A big thank you is also goes to our partner organisations who are part of the Swiss Hepatitis Strategy Network and who support us with their time in working for the Strategy and with contributions in-kind or with communication services. And last but not least, our network members who make up our base, have been instrumental in developing the strategy and are constantly developing it further. They all work un-paid and invested over 1,000 hours in the strategy in 2020.

# Team

## Board

Christophe Bösiger, Oberglatt (since 2019)

PD Dr. med. Philip Bruggmann, Zürich (President) (since 2017)

Prof. Dr. med. Andreas Cerny, Lugano (since 2017)

Dr. med. Montserrat Fraga Christinet, Lausanne (since 2018)

David Fehr, Rehetobel AR (since 2019)

Prof. Olivia Keiser, Genf (since 2017)

Dr. Daniel Lavanchy, Lausanne (since 2017)

Prof. Dr. Francesco Negro, Genf (since 2018)

Prof. Dr. med. Andri Rauch, Bern (until April 2020)

Dr. med. Claude Scheidegger, Basel (since 2017)

Prof. Dr. med. Dr. nat. phil. Nasser Semmo, Bern (until April 2020)

PD Dr. med. Christine Thurnheer (since April 2020)

## Office

Bettina Maeschli,  
Managing Director

Christophe Bösiger,  
Project Coordinator HepCare

Claude Scheidegger,  
Project Manager, Swiss HepFree in Prisons

Erminia Gagliotta,  
Project Coordinator Bel Paese

## Secretariat (in mandate)

Annina Haefelin and Claudia Füllemann, (until April 2020)

Alexandra Suter (since April 2020)

## Balance Sheet

	31.12.2020	31.12.2019
<b>ASSETS</b>		<b>CHF</b>
Cash	560'165	478'155
Other short-term receivables	16'400	110'000
Prepayments and accrued income	2'835	2'238
<b>Assets</b>	<b>579'401</b>	<b>590'393</b>
<b>LIABILITIES AND EQUITY</b>		
Payables from goods and services	12'690	0
Project funds	484'947	487'423
Accrued liabilities and deferred income	12'616	12'824
<b>Current liabilities</b>	<b>510'253</b>	<b>500'247</b>
Provisions	30'000	30'000
Free capital	60'146	38'754
Annual result	-20'999	21'393
<b>Organisation capital</b>	<b>69'147</b>	<b>90'146</b>
<b>Liabilities and equity</b>	<b>579'401</b>	<b>590'393</b>

## Statement of Operations

	2020	2019
<b>OPERATING INCOME</b>		<b>CHF</b>
Restricted allocations	263'900	635'071
Unrestricted allocations	110'500	111'500
Other revenues	0	9'563
<b>Operating Income</b>	<b>374'400</b>	<b>765'697</b>
<b>OPERATING EXPENSES</b>		
Expenses projects	211'300	340'452
Personnel expenses	127'758	145'346
Other operating expenses	58'776	9'777
<b>Operating result before depreciation, amortisation and impairment and financial result</b>	<b>-23'435</b>	<b>270'122</b>
Financial result	40	45
<b>Profit before changes in fund capital</b>	<b>-23'475</b>	<b>260'514</b>
Allocation to project funds	263'900	635'071
Withdrawal project funds	266'376	395'950
<b>Annual result</b>	<b>-20'999</b>	<b>21'393</b>

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[www.hepatitis-switzerland.ch](http://www.hepatitis-switzerland.ch)



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