

TINNITUS, TINNITUS RESEARCH INITIATIVE AND THE 1ST TRI MEETING

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Chronic Tinnitus is a debilitating and life-altering experience leading to an enormous social and economic burden. 1 in 10 adults have clinically significant tinnitus and for 1 in 100 adults tinnitus severely affects their ability to lead a normal life.

However, even if a large amount of different treatment strategies has been proposed, none of them can be considered as well-established or based on good scientific evidence.

Several factors may contribute to this unsatisfactory situation: A major problem is that only a small number of available treatment studies have been performed with an adequate design. Moreover a lack of generally accepted procedures for the assessment of tinnitus severity and treatment effects makes comparison between studies very difficult. Beside agreement on standards for tinnitus assessment the development of neurobiological markers is highly desirable: This may be achieved by further developing electrophysiologic or neuroimaging methods as instrument for objective diagnosis and for the monitoring of treatment effects.

Treatment research in the past has further been hampered by the limited understanding of the pathophysiology of tinnitus. However advances in neuroscience together with increasing interest in Tinnitus research during the last years have prompted an increasing number of studies using electrophysiology, neuroimaging and animal models. This research in turn has significantly contributed to a better understanding of the neurobiological mechanisms involved in the generation of tinnitus, its perpetuation and its consequences. The challenge for the future consists now in translating the results from basic research into clinical practice. Treatment procedures driven by pathophysiological hypothesis.

Another limiting factor may be the lack of interdisciplinary communication and collaboration: Tinnitus research and treatment is performed by a variety of disciplines, viewing the problem from various perspectives, focussing on different targets and using diverse approaches. Even if this strategy had considerable success in the understanding of distinct aspects of tinnitus, it was not able to perceive tinnitus as a whole. Therefore an important challenge for the future consists in improving cooperation between different disciplines involved in tinnitus research and treatment such as otologists, audiologists, neurologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, pharmacologists, engineers and neuroscientists.

Realizing that innovative research strategies may allow to overcome the problems which currently limit the understanding of tinnitus and the treatment possibilities, the Tinnitus Research Initiative has been founded as a private institution. Supported by philanthropy, TRI aims at facilitating the development of novel, effective therapies for tinnitus. Beside the support of biomedical research projects, TRI wants to provide a platform to enhance multidisciplinary cooperation and to allow fast information transfer of recent developments in the field. This first TRI meeting, which gathers experts with different backgrounds, from different disciplines and from all parts of the world, is intended to form the nucleus for a successful research network.