

## Comments on the First Summer School at the Theodor Billroth Academy ®

(Translation of the Press Release within the "Mitteilungen 08/2008" by bb)

Dear Prof. Schumpelick, Prof. Bauer, ladies and gentlemen,

It is widely recognized that we are living in a period in which better-trained specialists, and preferably young ones, are needed. However, the Federal Republic of Germany is suffering from a lack of skilled personnel not only in the fields of natural science and engineering, but also in the health sector. The shortage of recruits has already progressed to the point that there are almost weekly reports about there being whole areas of the country that have no doctors. There are certainly many reasons for this. As the younger generation in human medicine, even during our studies we hear from our teachers and also from the media about dissatisfaction with work pressure, incompatibility with family life, and comparatively poor income in the medical profession. At the same time, there are large companies in the financial sector and in the field of journalism that advertise for young medical students with lucrative offers. A very decisive aspect, however, is the education provided during the six-year course of study. The new regulations for the license to practice medicine are intended to increase the practical part of the course substantially, with class teaching making way for seminars and "bedside teaching." Unfortunately, most medical students have found that the hopes associated with the new licensing regulations have not been realized. A questionnaire among young students during their practical year in 2007, conducted by Via Medici, clearly demonstrated educational shortcomings in the system and the resulting frustration among students. Surgery in particular has suffered from these developments.

A noted German university surgeon has now had the courage to contend against such developments. This summer, Prof. Björn Brücher implemented his long-planned project for a new form of training for tomorrow's young surgeons. He founded the **Theodor Billroth Academy** ® and organized its first *Summer School* (first) for German medical students in 2008. The staff and facilities needed for this highly unusual project were provided unreservedly by his head of department, Prof. Königsrainer, Professor of General, Visceral and Transplant Surgery at Tübingen University Hospital.

As students at this unusual 2-week summer school at the **Theodor Billroth Academy** ®, we had the privilege of learning surgical techniques and discussing scientific issues in the company of some of Germany's most outstanding surgeons and scientists. Prof. Brücher succeeded in winning the support of participating tutors from all over the country. At the beginning, none of us had the slightest idea that we would be carrying out gastroscopies, colonoscopies, an instructively designed four-step suturing course (part I-IV) and even a laparoscopic cholecystectomy in a dummy model using a swine liver. In addition, there were also tutorial working lectures in anatomy, in which we learned surgical dissection using donor bodies (with seven cadavers at a total of four work stations!), carried out various abdominal operations and also tracheotomies and coniotomies. But the two weeks were also marked by the interdisciplinary aspects of surgery, so that in special courses we also met colleagues from other fields that are important for the successful treatment of patients. These clinical lectures in pathology,

radiology, oncology, and biometry not only imparted theoretical knowledge, but also the practical skills needed.

As students participating in the *First Summer School* of the newly founded **Theodor Billroth Academy** ® in 2008, it is difficult for us to describe fully in this letter all of the positive impressions we had of this unusual idea and the way in which it was achieved and implemented by Prof. Brücher. The best we can do is try to express the way in which the **Theodor Billroth Academy** ® is pioneering a new pathway for the education of students who are interested in (academic) surgery – a path which we hope will be pursued further. In addition, we hope this will be done in the future with even wider support from all sides, so that the approach can be extended and other equally “new” modules in the field of education and further training can be added, as we were told would be possible.

For all of the fellow students who follow us, we hope they will be able to take part in and enjoy the summer school at the **Theodor Billroth Academy** ® as well. The start along this new path that was needed has been made – and the younger generation of doctors is thirsty for more!

Yours sincerely, on behalf of all the participants at the *2008 Summer School*

Sven Flemming

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