

**PRELIMINARY SCIENTIFIC
PROGRAM**

KEPLER CROSS CANCER CHALLENGES **APPROACHING THE UNSOLVABLES**



**JOHANNES KEPLER
UNIVERSITÄT LINZ**

**MEDIZINISCHE
FAKULTÄT**

**A THINK-TANK-LIKE MEETING
BY INVITATION ONLY
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ALPS**

SCHLADMING • AUSTRIA • JAN 29–31 2026

Kepler Cross Cancer Challenges 2026

Approaching the unsolvables

Congress Schladming, Styria

JAN 29 – FEB 01 2026



Clemens A. Schmitt
Johannes Kepler University
Linz, Austria



Soyoung Lee
Johannes Kepler University
Linz, Austria

Dear congress participants,

Progress in preclinical cancer research and advances in medical oncology have been tremendous over the recent decades. Molecular insights into tumor pathogenesis, deeper understanding of tumor-immune interactions, and an arsenal of novel agents including targeted therapeutics and immune-oncology compounds have literally revolutionized current practice in clinical cancer care.

Despite the fireworks of disruptive innovations: key obstacles remain, and some of them seem too big to conquer. Driven by high-pace data generation and increasing specialization, future oncology is at risk to get fragmented into isolated 'expert bubbles' that may miss to capitalize on opportunities emerging in other cancer types or even non-cancer

fields. Breakthrough findings often arise from unplanned observations or cross-fertilizing ideas in other research areas – but require awareness, curiosity and exchange across boundaries in the right format.

In this special 'think-tank-like' cancer conference organized by members of the young medical faculty of the Johannes Kepler University in Linz/Austria, we aim at bringing together leading experts across basic, translational and clinical disciplines to address some of those seemingly 'Unsolvable' in dedicated focus sessions by sharing and complementing their specialist insights with ample time for active discussions.

The meeting will take place in the village of Schladming, known for its snowy four-mountain area in the heart of the Austrian alps, just a short commute from Salzburg airport. This location sets the perfect frame for the retreat-like character of our conference – to widen our horizon and open new perspectives from the top of the mountains...

We look forward to welcoming you next January in Schladming for an exciting out-of-the-box scientific get-together,

Sincerely yours,

Clemens A. Schmitt, Hematology/Oncology, and

Soyoung Lee, Tumor Biology

Johannes Kepler University, Linz, Austria

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Thursday, Jan 29 2026

SCIENTIFIC ORGANIZERS

Univ.-Prof. Clemens A. Schmitt

Univ.-Prof. Soyoung Lee

15.30 **OPEN WELCOME DESK**
Congress Schladming

WELCOME NOTE

17.00 **Clemens A. Schmitt**, Linz
Rector Stefan Koch, JKU Linz tbc
Vice Dean Medical Faculty Elgin Drda, JKU, Linz, tbc
Major Hermann Trinker, Schladming, tbc

MOLECULARLY INFORMED PERSONALIZED MEDICINE – ARE WE THERE?

Chairs: **Dominik Wolf**, Innsbruck; **Soyung Lee**, Linz

17.30 **Scott Lowe**, New York - Functional genomics of cancer

18.00 **Christoph Bock**, Vienna - Cancer at single-cell resolution

18.30 **Thorsten Zenz**, Zurich - The future of personalized personalized cancer precision medicine

19.00 Discussion

19.15 Welcome Aperitif

19.45 Congress Dinner

Friday, Jan 30 2026

08.00 **OPEN WELCOME DESK**

CANCER CELL PERSISTS, MRD, TREATMENT FAILURE

Chair: **Richard Greil**, Salzburg; **Rupert Langer**, Linz, tbc

08.30 **Catherin O'Brien**, Toronto - Determining and targeting hibernating cancer cells

08.50 **Alberto Bardelli**, Turin - Adaptive evolution of cancer cell persistence

09.10 **Clemens A. Schmitt**, Linz - Senescence-like persists and treatment failure

09.30 Discussion

09.50 Coffee Break

EARLY DISSEMINATION AND METASTASIS

Chairs: **Gudrun Piringer**, Linz; **Gerald Prager**, Vienna

10.10 **Christoph Klein**, Regensburg - Premalignant spreading in breast cancer

10.30 **Andres Cervantes**, Valencia - Metastatic trajectories in colorectal cancer

10.50 **Andreas Trumpf**, Heidelberg, Neuronal hijacking in pancreatic cancer

11.10 Discussion

SATELLITE / LUNCH SYMPOSIUM

12.00 Fitting one overarching topic such as 'nextgen immunotherapeutics at the horizon'

I - Spatial sc-omics

'Deep spatial single-cell multiplex analyses in cancer and immunology or 10x Genomics

II - Cell-based immunoncology therapeutics

'Bispecific antibodies in lymphoma care'

III - Point-of-care CAR T-cell manufacturing

'Point-of-care CAR T-cell manufacturing or Start Up Captain T-cell (Therapeutic T-cell engineering)

VI - Senolytics

'Senolytics in cancer and age-related pathologies' or Rubedo Life Science (Senolytics, skin focus)

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HYPE, HOPE AND HINDRANCE IN CELL-BASED CANCER IMMUNE THERAPIES

Chairs: Annkristin Heine, Graz; Nina Worel, Vienna

- 14.30 **Manfred Lehner**, Vienna - Next-Gen CAR T-cells
- 14.50 **Franziska Blaeschek**, Heidelberg - Improving engineered cell-based therapies
- 15.10 **Hendrik Poeck**, Regensburg - Microbiome modulation of CAR T-cell function
- 15.30 Discussion
- 15.50 Coffee Break

CELLULAR SENESCENCE, CANCER HETEROGENEITY, PLASTICITY AND DYNAMICS

Chairs: Claudia Lengerke, Tübingen; Andreas Reinisch, Graz

- 16.10 **Margaret A. Goodell**, Houston - Cell-autonomous and non-cell-autonomous implications of hematopoietic aging
- 16.30 **Hugues de Thé**, Paris - State switches in leukemogenesis
- 16.50 **Martin Schönlein**, Vienna - Senescence as homogenizer and predictor in AML
- 17.00 **Federico Pietrocola**, Karolinska - Cancer at the crossroads of aging and derailed immunity
- 17.20 **Maurice Reimann**, Berlin OR **Soyoung Lee**, Linz - A novel pan-senolytic
- 17.40 Discussion
- 18.00 Aperitif at posters 'The game-changing project I would like to start tomorrow'
- 19.30 Congress Dinner

Saturday, Jan 31 2026

08.00 **OPEN WELCOME DESK**

OVERLOOKED FOR LONG: THE NERVE-CANCER CONNECTION

Chairs: Sussana Zieler, Linz, tbc; Ihsan Ekin Demir, München

- 08.30 **Frank Winkler**, Heidelberg - The neuro-cancer connection
- 08.50 **Sebastien Talbot**, Stockholm - The neuro-immune crosstalk in cancer
- 09.10 **Christian Reinhardt**, Essen - Targeting lung cancer innervation
- 09.30 Discussion - **Fahad Benthai**, New York OR **Sam Sharifi**, Linz - Senescence and neural plasticity
- 09.50 Coffee Break

NO INNOCENT BYSTANDER: TARGETING THE CANCER ENVIRONMENT

Chairs: Philipp Jost, Graz; Barbara Maier, Vienna

- 10.10 **Hans Clevers**, Utrecht - Cancer organoids for precision oncology
- 10.30 **Sheila Stewart**, St. Louis - The dynamic cancer implications of cellular senescence in the TME
- 10.50 **James DeGeorgi**, Denver - Aging and infection as cancer drivers
- 11.10 Discussion
- 12.00 Lunch Break

AUGMENTED HORIZONS AND EMERGING PATTERNS- AI IN CANCER RESEARCH

Chairs: Clemens A. Schmitt, Linz; Erich Kobler, Linz

- 13.00 **Franziska Michor**, Boston - Computational approaches to cancer eradication
- 13.20 **Klaus-Peter Adlassnig**, Vienna - Digital avatar-based clinical decision support in personalized cancer medicine
- 13.50 **Jakob Nikolas Kather**, Dresden - AI agents in tomorrow's personalized cancer care [Online]
- 14.10 Discussion
- 14.30 Concluding remarks and official farewell

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Saturday, Jan 31 2026

CLOSED SESSION 1

Chairs: Soyoung Lee, Linz; Clemens A. Schmitt, Linz.

15.00 - Closed Talks
16.40

16.40 Coffee Break

CLOSED SESSION 2

Chairs: Soyoung Lee, Linz; Clemens A. Schmitt, Linz.

17.00 - Closed Talks
18.40

19.00 Closed Dinner

Sunday, Feb 1 2026

08.00 OPEN WELCOME DESK

CLOSED SESSION 3

Chairs: Soyoung Lee, Linz; Clemens A. Schmitt, Linz.

08.30 - Closed Talk
09.50

09.50 Coffee Break

CLOSED SESSION 4

Chairs: Soyoung Lee, Linz; Clemens A. Schmitt, Linz.

10.10 - Closed Talk
11.30 Wrap-up, Conclusions and Perspectives [all closed session participants]

12.30 Light Lunch and Take-off

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CONTACT

For questions about the programm, schedule and sessions, please contact the congress presidents of the **Kepler Cross Cancer Challenges 2026**.

SCIENTIFIC ORGANIZERS

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SERVICE

The team will be glad to answer any questions regarding arrival, departure, hotel accommodation, and more.
We are looking forward to hear from you.

LEADER

Peter G. Lercher, President

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