



宁夏医科大学

**Eighth International Symposium on Frontiers in Life Sciences  
New Advances and Challenges in Multidisciplinary Research**

**August 25-28, 2010, YinChuan, China**



香港中文大学

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Axel Ullrich is Director of the Department of Molecular Biology at the Max Planck Institute of Biochemistry in Martinsried, Germany, and Research Director of the Singapore OncoGenome (SOG) project for the **Institute of Medical Biology** at the Singapore Agency for Science, Technology, and Research (A\*STAR). Axel Ullrich trained as a biochemist at the Eberhard Karls University in Tübingen, Germany, and was awarded his PhD in molecular genetics by the Heidelberg University in Heidelberg, Germany, in 1975. After a postdoctoral tenure at the University of California in San Francisco, CA, USA, he joined Genentech, where his work led to the development of insulin isophane (currently marketed as Humulin® by Lilly Diabetes) – the first gene technology-based therapeutic – and trastuzumab (Herceptin®) – the first target-directed oncogene-based cancer treatment. In 1988 he became Director of the Department of Molecular Biology at the Max Planck Institute for Biochemistry, where the identification of VEGFR2 as a critical receptor for tumour angiogenesis led to the development of Sunitinib (Sutent® by Pfizer Oncology), a multi-targeted kinase inhibitor used in the treatment of kidney cancer and gastrointestinal stromal tumours. Professor Ullrich is a leader in molecular medicine worldwide, translating basic science discoveries into clinical applications. For his achievements he received numerous honours and awards, including the Robert Koch Prize (2001), the King Faisal International Prize for Medicine (2003), the Dr. Paul Janssen Award for Biomedical Research (2009) and the Wolf Prize for Medicine (2010). With more than 80 000 citations of his 500 publications he is one of the 10 most highly cited scientists worldwide.