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Onur Boyman



Some people continue to suffer the long-term effects of Covid-19 months after they have had the infection. Symptoms include fatigue, breathlessness, and brain fog. The Federal Office of Public Health calls this “post Covid-19 condition”, also known as Long Covid. The phenomenon has left medical professionals scratching their collective heads. The symptoms are varied and hard to quantify. Doctors often do not know how to diagnose or treat it. Many with Long Covid have to take long-term leave from work. To date, over 5,000 people with Long Covid in Switzerland have claimed on their disability insurance. “Those affected are hit hard,” says Onur Boyman, professor of clinical immunology at the University of Zurich. Unfortunately, symptoms are often easily dismissed as a psychosomatic condition. A team of researchers led by Boyman has now shown in a study published in the world-renowned “Science” magazine that a part of our immune system called the complement system plays an important role in Long Covid. “In patients with Long Covid, the complement system no longer returns to the resting state as it should,” Boyman explains. The researchers were able to prove that excessive complement system activity causes damage to different cells in the body, including red blood cells, platelets and blood vessels. This discovery paves the way for diagnosis by blood test. It also opens up new avenues for the development of more targeted therapies, says Boyman. But more research is necessary, and this will take time. Nevertheless, Boyman and his Zurich colleagues have now removed some of the stigma attached to the condition.

SUSANNE WENGER

Court rules that Swiss climate policy shortcomings violate human rights

In a landmark decision that could trickle down to influence climate law around the Europe, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled on 9 April in Strasbourg that the Swiss government’s alleged inaction on climate change violates human rights. This was after a group of older Swiss women (see Review 6/2023: “Grannies’ take Switzerland to court to demand more action on climate change”) argued that the state has a duty of care to protect the right to life, and that the Swiss government’s weak climate policies are failing them in this regard. The ECHR agrees that Switzerland has underdelivered on reducing carbon emissions and combating the existential threat of climate change. The ruling could now force Switzerland to act quicker and more decisively in cutting greenhouse gases.

(MUL)

Switzerland and the EU open talks on a new agreement

On 18 March 2024, Switzerland and the European Union (EU) began fresh talks on an agreement to govern Swiss-EU relations. There has been a protracted period of uncertainty since the Federal Council unilaterally abandoned negotiations with the EU on a new framework agreement three years ago. Following an arduous series of exploratory talks aimed at picking up the pieces, Switzerland and the EU now have a basis to resume formal negotiations. The aim is to complete these negotiations by the end of this year. The process will be anything but easy with many issues still unresolved, said President of the Swiss Confederation Viola Amherd as the negotiations began. An agreement on relations with the neighbouring EU is of great importance to Switzerland not only regarding the free movement of people and goods, but also in terms of science and research.

(MUL)

Gantrisch Nature Park is very dark

Gantrisch Nature Park, which is roughly situated in a triangle between the cities of Berne, Fribourg and Thun, received the “Dark Sky Park” certification in March from Dark Sky International. It is now the first and only area in Switzerland to have been certified for its night-time darkness. The Gantrisch Dark Sky Zone is the protected dark heart of the nature park, covering 100 square kilometres. Gantrisch project manager Nicole Dahinden called the certification a “big deal”, while Lydia Plüss of the Gantrisch promotional association said it was a pat on the back for all those who “help to preserve our nightscape”. The Gantrisch area is a key stopping-off point for migrating birds – who also rely on night-time darkness, just like amphibians, insects and other nocturnal creatures. “Swiss Review” covered the Gantrisch project back in 2019: revue.link/night

(MUL)