



Tania Distler grew up in a small village in the northern part of Germany. After high school, she was still undecided on which path to take next, so she travelled to New Zealand for a gap year. This experience taught her to be less afraid of stepping out of her comfort zone and sparked her love for travelling and learning about other cultures.

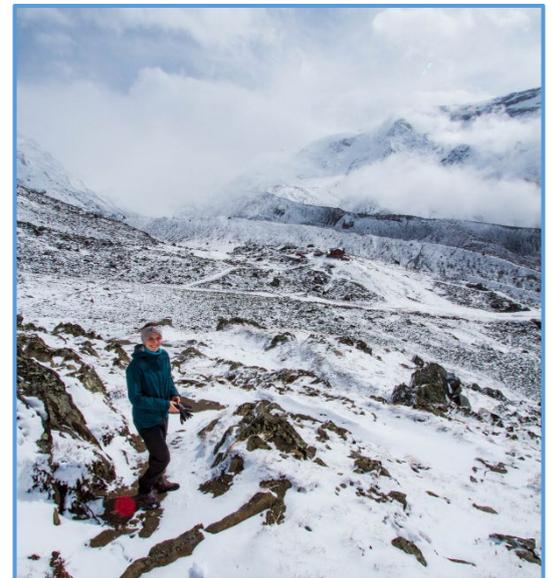
Once she returned to Germany, she began her undergraduate studies in Molecular Biotechnology at the University of Heidelberg. During this time, she became very interested in stem cell research and learning how tissues form and regenerate. She therefore decided to join the Master's program in Regenerative Biology and Medicine at the Technical University of Dresden. With her MSc degree complete, and because she had only experienced academia, Tania was curious about working in industry, and did a one-year internship in early research and development at a pharma company. This experience reinforced her decision to seek a PhD position in a healthcare-related field.

Tania was offered a PhD project in Prof. Alexandre Persat's lab in the Global Health Institute at EPFL, so she packed her things and headed off to begin her doctoral studies in Lausanne. Tania feels lucky to be working on this doctoral project, which allows her to apply her knowledge in tissue biology to the real-world problem of antimicrobial resistance. In her free time, she enjoys the outdoors, especially going hiking and skiing in the Swiss Alps.

An interview with Tania Distler:

The biggest challenge facing women clinicians and scientists today is...

I am fortunate that I have personally never experienced any discrimination because of my gender. I grew up in a country where it is the norm for women to study and pursue a scientific career, and I was lucky to grow up with a family that supported me. However, I realize that for many young women this is not the case. From my perspective, being a scientist or a clinician is a very demanding job independent of gender and comes with a high workload and many responsibilities especially at the group leader level. I believe one of the major reasons why many women still hesitate to pursue a career in academia after the doctorate or post-doctorate is because they do not think this type of job is compatible with a family life. To change that we need more positive role models showing that it is in fact possible to combine the two. I also think the work culture in academia needs to change towards being more accepting of women and men having a healthy work-life balance and taking time off for family.



I chose a scientific career because...

...already back in high school, I was fascinated by the complexity of biological systems. What I like about science is that it never gets boring. There is always something we do not understand yet or a problem that needs to be solved. What I enjoy about being a scientist is that it challenges me every day and I am constantly learning something new.

If I were not a scientist, I would be...

...this may sound a little cliché, but I always wanted to do a job that benefits humanity in one way or another. Hence, working in the healthcare sector seemed like an obvious choice for me. So, if I was not a scientist, I would probably have become a medical doctor.

What I like most about being part of the NCCR AntiResist project...

...is the collaborative mind-set and the interdisciplinarity with people coming from many different backgrounds including engineers, microbiologists and clinicians.

A typical day for me looks like...

I am working with a human infection model of the lung called AirGel. It is a 3D tube-like structure embedded in a microfluidic chip with an airway epithelium on the inside (so basically a lung-on-chip model) which we derive from primary human bronchial epithelial cells. We use this model to simulate infections of the airways with the opportunistic pathogen *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*. These are bacteria that typically infect the lungs of immuno-compromised patients such as in the case of cystic fibrosis or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease -COPD. Our goal is to learn more about how infection occurs -how the bacteria and the human cells interact- so that new treatments can be developed.

What I am most proud of...

I am most proud that I always took my time to make important life and career choices even if it included a few detours. Eventually, it allowed me to realize what I enjoy doing the most and what I value in life.