

“One of my passions is engagement with patients and the public, who are the very heart of clinical research”

**Eva Segelov holds the position of Full Professor for Clinical Research and Director of the Department of Clinical Research (DCR) at the Medical Faculty of the University of Bern. In this interview, she discusses her visionary outlook for the DCR and explains what she likes most about Switzerland.**

**What motivated you to move from Australia to Switzerland and take on the role of Director of the DCR?**

*Eva Segelov:* Yes I can see it's a bit out of the ordinary, but the truth is that in my career, after I specialised in Oncology and did a lab based PhD, I started my family (3 children), so that the chance to work overseas escaped me. So, I really wanted to have the experience of living and working in another country (especially one in the centre of Europe!) but above all, this position as Director of DCR was so attractive and innovative that the opportunity was too good to pass up.

**What do you enjoy most about Switzerland?**

We love everything - the nature, the beauty of Bern (we live in the Altstadt) and the countryside, the lack of need for a car (we used to drive 1 hour each way to work), the friendliness of the people and of course, the bread and pastries! One surprise was the informality of the dress code here- I came with suitcases of designer suits but have worn jeans and sneakers every day and just loving it!



**Prof. Dr. Eva Segelov is a specialist in Medical Oncology, in particular Gastrointestinal Cancers and Neuroendocrine Tumours. Her research career has focused on clinical trials, in particular investigator-initiated trials, with translational research on trial biospecimens.**

**What do you miss about Australia?**

Something Switzerland will never have - beaches! But the lakes and the Aare are pretty good substitutes. Also vegemite! And not paying so much for a coffee!

**As a passionate researcher in Medical Oncology, what fascinates you the most about clinical research?**

I love everything about clinical research and it's a privilege to be able to spend all day dedicated to each and every aspect - from mentoring, new protocol development, our own clinical trial research, to liaising with many existing and new partners - clinicians, biotech, industry. One of my passions is engagement with patients and the public, who are the very heart of clinical research, and our DCR project in Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) is one of our flagships.

**In your opinion, what are the most significant challenges in conducting clinical research in Switzerland?**

It's interesting coming from literally the other side of the world, to see that so many challenges are similar, such as limited funding for investigated initiated trials and sadly, the persisting gender inequity in clinical trial leadership roles. The relatively small population and high costs in Switzerland are often explained to me as specific barriers. But if you consider that only around 5% of patients worldwide participate in clinical trials, Switzerland with its high quality of health care and innovation, should be able to contribute significantly to trials of all phases and topics.

**What is your vision for the DCR?**

The DCR comprises CTU Bern (located at Mittlestrasse on the University campus), the CIU (Clinical Investigation Unit, co-located with CIU and DLF in the wonderful sitem-insel building) and a new Unit, Medical Data Science (MDS). So across all of these, we have a very comprehensive suite of professional skills in clinical research.

Our vision is to be the focal point in a patient-centered, flexible use hub-and-spoke model for clinical research across the faculty and university health services, providing leadership, partnership, mentoring and promotion of research excellence. Our mission is to support and enhance all aspects of clinical research in these institutions through existing and new collaborations with internal and external partners. And finally, our value proposition is to be a

"One stop shop" of expertise for all aspects of translational and clinical research, integrating and facilitating the entire clinical research journey.

**How do you plan to leverage your previous experiences and expertise in your new role?**

I see my role as enhancing and building the DCR and contributing from my experience as a lifelong clinical trials and translational researcher. I've probably made every mistake in the book by my own hand, so I am keen to share my learnings and co-develop studies with investigators that are optimally designed and implemented.

Apart from PPI already mentioned, I am keen to use my experience in teletrials to advance that field here (someone told me that Switzerland is as large as Australia if you would iron out all the mountains!).

Mentoring junior researchers, adding health economic evaluations to trials and promoting gender equity and diversity are also areas that I hope to impact.

**What are your priorities for your first year?**

We have clear priorities including our PPI project; the DCR Grant Writing workshop which has already started and pleasingly was oversubscribed; expanding the use of the wonderful CIU facility (please come over and have a look if you haven't seen it for a while).

I believe that ensuring an excellent patient experience is a strong part of reciprocity to clinical trial participants and aids recruitment and retention of participants as well as researchers.

**What strategies do you have in mind to engage and collaborate with the research community at Inselspital?**

Lots of coffees! I'm really trying to meet with as many people as I can, and I have already been able to connect some researchers for new projects, as well as with external parties. There are wonderful resources across the Inselspital / University / sitem-insel campuses but I understand there are also some silos that could be deconstructed to enhance multidisciplinary collaborations. We have also worked

hard on our website [www.dcr.unibe](http://www.dcr.unibe) and social media, particularly Linked in (please follow us!). Our Strategic and Business Development Plans (currently being finalised) outline our program for seeking opportunities with the broad research community- local, national and international.

One important strategy is to emphasize our expertise with clinical trial budgeting, our mentoring and consultative services and the flexible way that our beautiful CIU facility can be used. Please contact us anytime to discuss what we can do for you.

I've really enjoyed setting up our DCR consultation service, where anyone can come to discuss a clinical research idea, in any stage of development- and not only for statistical plans! We have had a great uptake by researchers from many clinical areas, particularly

with the upcoming SNF and Nachwuchsförderungs grants. We also offer a specific PPI consultation service, and again this has been very popular, in combination with our DCR PPI resources we have developed (also available on our website). And just last week we announced the 11 successful applicants for our inaugural DCR Grant Writing Workshop which will run as a modular program over the next 6 months.

#### **Where do you see synergies with the DLF?**

The DCR spans both the Faculty of Medicine and the University Hospitals, and for the Inselspital we sit within the DLF from an organisational structural perspective. So - we are close! Being in adjacent offices facilitates collaboration, and we are all keen to promote the site-Inselspital research precinct as an easily accessible, comprehensive service to assist all clinical researchers. So I hope to see you here soon!