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Media Release

23rd Steven Karger Prize Awarded to University of Basel Clinical Psychologist for Research on Premenstrual Syndrome

The award went to Dr. Antje Frey Nascimento for her publication “Efficacy of open-label placebos for premenstrual syndrome”.

The 23rd Steven Karger Prize, donated by the Karger Publishers Foundation, was awarded on November 28, 2025 by the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Basel during its annual Dies Academicus ceremony that celebrates the University’s founding in 1460. **Dr. Antje Frey Nascimento**, Chief Therapist at the Centre for Psychotherapy at the University of Basel, received the award for her publication “Efficacy of open-label placebos for premenstrual syndrome: A randomised controlled trial” in the scientific journal *BMJ Evidence-Based Medicine*.

In her research, Dr. Antje Frey Nascimento has demonstrated that open-label placebos (OLPs) can significantly alleviate symptoms of premenstrual syndrome (PMS) in women, particularly when accompanied by a comprehensive treatment rationale. PMS affects nearly half of women of reproductive age, causing both physical and psychological distress that can impair daily functioning. Traditional treatments often have limited efficacy and may produce undesirable side effects, highlighting the need for alternative therapeutic approaches.

In this study, 150 women aged 18 to 45 with moderate to severe PMS were randomly assigned to one of three groups: a control group continuing usual treatment, an OLP group without additional information, and an OLP group provided with a detailed explanation of the placebo effect. Participants in the OLP groups took two placebo pills daily for six weeks.

The findings revealed that both OLP groups experienced a reduction in PMS symptoms. However, the group that received the treatment rationale reported the most significant improvement, with symptom intensity decreasing by up to 80%. This suggests that understanding the placebo effect enhances its efficacy. The study also noted high adherence to the OLP regimen and minimal side effects, indicating that OLPs are a safe and well-accepted intervention for PMS. These results underscore the potential of OLPs as a viable

treatment option, especially when patients are informed about the nature and mechanism of the placebo effect.

“Dr. Frey Nascimento’s convincing research highlights the importance of providing a treatment rationale to patients, not only because it respects their right to be informed, but also because it may amplify the intervention’s effectiveness,” says **Prof. Dr. Rui Mata, Dean of Research for the Faculty of Psychology, University of Basel.**

“In honor of the memory of my late brother and former CEO of the publishing house, Steven Karger, we celebrate Dr. Nascimento’s valuable findings that have provided crucial insights into improved treatment for premenstrual syndrome that affects nearly half of all women of child-bearing age,” states **Gabriella Karger, Chairwoman of the Board of Trustees of the Karger Publishers Foundation.**

About Karger Publishers Foundation

In memory of the founder of Karger Publishers, Samuel Karger, and his successors, Heinz, Thomas and Steven Karger, the foundation honors the 135-year-old tradition of publishing by recognizing and celebrating scientific work in medicine and related domains.