

Biotechnology Innovation and Sustainable Development Report of The 7th SABPA Bio-pharma Conference 2008

The 7th San Diego Bio-pharma Conference 2008 was successfully held on Saturday, June 14th, 2008, at Hilton Del Mar. Despite US Open and the San Diego County Fair opening on the same day, the conference attracted more than 400 attendees from both industry and academia. The theme of this year's symposium was on "Drug Discovery & Development: What We Should Do Differently".

The 2008 San Diego Bio-pharma conference started with three eye-opening seminars on innovative approaches for the discovery of novel medicines. Dr. Balkrishen Bhat, senior director of chemistry from Regulus Therapeutics, introduced their efforts on developing micro-RNAs as therapeutics. Since microRNAs regulate the expression of broad networks of genes and biological pathways, microRNA therapeutics offer a new strategy to target multiple points on disease pathways. Dr. Charls Cantor, CSO of Sequenom, shared their experience utilizing nucleic acids in personalized medicine, both as diagnostic tools and potential therapeutics. Dr. Steve Kaldor, CEO of Ambrx and a veteran drug hunter, discussed using protein medicinal chemistry to create science and business value. With the technology discovered in town by Dr. Peter Shultz's research group, Ambrx is finding innovative methods to introduce non-natural amino acids into important protein therapeutics at key sequence locations to improve overall drug properties.

Following the morning scientific session, Mr Jack Lief, co-founder, President and CEO of Arena Pharmaceuticals, shared his perspective on evolving business models for Bio-Pharma R&D in the panel discussion. "It is a very exciting time for the biotechnology industry now," he said. "The genome sequencing has finished and it offers lots of opportunities for new drug discovery." Mr. Stephen Bent, partner of Foley & Lardner LLP and member of the Biotechnology & Pharmaceutical Practice Group, joined the discussion from a different angle. "The biggest problem is innovation. There has been a shortage of resources for innovative development in this field," he said. "The efforts now are to globalize the search for new innovation from all sources, all over the world including China. Our biggest challenge is to adapt to the different environments and bring our business models effectively to companies in China."

Dr. Mike Varney, VP of small molecule drug discovery at Genentech ignited the audience with his high energy and animated presentation. From one of the most successful biotech companies, he introduced the history and current approach of small molecule drug discovery at Genentech and the synergistic value it brings to the company. In addition, Dr. Varney shared his vision on characteristics of successful small molecule, successful project team and successful drug discovery organization with emphasis on having great people, fully empowered and integrated team.

Dr. Mark Benedyk, Head of the Pfizer incubator, gave a talk on "The Pfizer Incubator: Strategic Investment in Early-Stage Technologies". As a new investment model that Pfizer is taking

forward, the incubator provides vital access to new technology and will enrich the portfolio Pfizer has here at La Jolla and across the globe. Similar to venture and option funds that other companies, such as Novartis, GSK and Eli Lilly, set up to access technology in early stage, the incubator is a new category of investment, which allows Pfizer to tap into new discovery and technology from outside world. The main mission for the incubator is to connect with academia and research institutes and form alliances. Both sides will share the risks with the aim to bring in the technology or new drugs to Pfizer in a two- to three-year timeframe. Part of the driver for this innovative approach is the ever changing environment faced by the biotech/pharmaceutical industry. With coming patent expiration, changing regulatory landscape and shifted geographical and capital flow, this is one of Pfizer adaptations to challenges and to do things differently.

As part of the conference tradition, this year the San Diego Bio-Pharm Achievement Award was presented to Dr. Shu Chien, professor of Bioengineering and Medicine and Director of the Whitaker Institute of Biomedical Engineering at University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and an honorary member of SABPA. As a world leader in applying bioengineering and physiology to health and diseases, Dr. Chien is one of the few scientists who are members of all three U.S. national institutes: the National Academy of Sciences; the National Academy of Engineering; and the Institute of Medicine. He is also a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. At his Award speech, Dr. Chien shared with audience his views on three recent industry trends: Genome individualization; nanomedicine and regenerative medicine. He also compared China with USA in the areas of publications, patent applications, supporting funds and education. Citing a recent article published in Cell Biology, titled “The Returning Tide: How China, the world’s most populous country, is building a competitive base”, Dr. Chien commented that China is catching up. Dr Chien summarized seven seeds, which include compassion, commitment, comprehension, creativity, communication, cooperative and consummation as key elements in his personal career development. “With the missions of networking, career development, education, and pacific connection,” Dr. Chien concluded, “SABPA is doing great job bridging the academia and industry, China and USA. I’m very grateful and humbled to be awarded this award. I felt much honored to be here today.”

Mr. Weimin Zhou, Vice-Director General of Beijing Investment Promotion Bureau, and Mr. Xinxin Zhao, Deputy Director of Beijing Biotechnology Park, headed a special delegation from Beijing specifically for the conference. In a dazzling presentation loaded with pictures, both of them showcased the infrastructure Beijing has put together to support biotechnology development. Mr. Zhou also compared Beijing with Shanghai, their strengths and uniqueness, and pointed out that





the drug discovery and development is one of new areas that Beijing is committed for future development. Dr. Lei Sun, CEO and President of Beijing AbMax Biotechnology, presented his company's vision and rapid development from an individual company's perspective.

This year was the first time the conference was jointly organized by SABPA and SDCA since its inception in 2002. Dr. Hui Li, President of SABPA San Diego Chapter, commented that many Chinese professionals are working in the field of life science in greater San Diego area. As a group collectively, we'd like to make our voice heard. That's the motivation that drove SABPA and SDCA to initiate this series of symposia 7 years ago. We are happy to see that our audience is growing each year and the

impact is reaching out far beyond the local Chinese community". He also pointed out the reason we chose this topic for 2008 "in face of the tough time in the industry and looking for new growing force, we asked ourselves "what we can do differently?". This year we were fortunate to be able to invite high caliber speakers that included CEOs, CSOs, and company founders. Now it is a very dynamic time: traditional pharmaceutical companies are looking into opportunities in the bio-therapeutics while established biotechs are tapping into small molecules drug discovery as well. It was great to have Pfizer and Genentech from both worlds to share their perspectives in the same forum.

Dr. Tian Feng, President of SDCA (San Diego Chinese Association), agreed with Dr. Hui Li that this joint event brought out the best of both associations. With increased impact and greater visibility, this annual event has become a signature platform for people to get to know what's new in the San Diego bio world, to meet with old and new friends, and to look for new business opportunities.

This intellectual feast was made possible by distinguished speakers and panelists from biopharmaceutical and professional services communities around the world including San Diego, Bay area, Singapore and Beijing. The success of this event also lies with the support from an unprecedented number of corporate sponsors, new or sustained; and the best efforts from SABPA volunteers, event organizing committee, and other **co-organizers**.