

CABA 2009 Annual Conference Report: Featuring Biomedical Innovation and US-China Partnership

By William YongZhong Wang, Ph.D.

As the VP and Head of Chemical Sciences of Wyeth Research and an over 30-year veteran in academia and industry, Dr. Tarek Monsour is no stranger to annual conferences of professional organizations. However, he was greatly impressed by the 2009 annual conference of a relatively young organization, Chinese-American BioMedical Association (CABA). One day after delivering the keynote speech at the conference, he wrote, “I sensed a strong sense of warmth and collaboration/support by the participants. This is a great thing accredited to the founders and the Chairs and Committees to promote themes in science and technology. You should be very proud of this achievement and accomplishment. I heard so many positive comments from participants and speakers about the day so again this is a strong testimony for your vision and leadership as an organization”.

Dr. Monsour’s impression was indeed shared by many prominent speakers and seasoned biotech professionals who attended the one-day conference held at the MIT faculty club on Saturday, April 11, 2009. Dr. Tim Clackson, the Senior Vice President and Chief Scientific Officer at Ariad Pharmaceuticals Inc presented the innovations made by Ariad at the conference and commented afterwards, “it was a really great conference and you and your colleagues are to be congratulated. I look forward to my continued involvement with CABA.”

With an audience of around 300 from United States and China, the conference drew its energy from the concentrated science, education, and medicine community of “Genetown” Cambridge and its adjacent areas, as well as a prosperous pharmaceutical industry in China. Its success was a tribute to strong support from many local and international pharmaceutical and biomedical companies (for a complete list of conference sponsors, please visit www.cabaweb.org).

The theme of the conference was “biomedical innovations and US-China partnership”. It featured 4 sessions and 16 high profile speakers including senior executives from top Chinese CRO companies such as WuXi AppTec, ChemPartner, Chemizon, BioDuro, Medicilon, Sundia, and GenScript; major pharmaceutical companies such as Wyeth, Novartis, Genzyme, and Schering-Plough, as well as seasoned VC and IP lawyers (for a complete program and a list of speakers, please visit www.cabaweb.org).

The morning sessions were hosted by Drs. Chaoyang Dai and Wendy Zhang. Senior executives from the Chinese companies excited the audience with the rapid development, emerging opportunities, and challenges of the biotech industry in China and its significant impact on the global market. The two afternoon sessions, chaired by Drs. Zhiyong Yang, Sue Ma, Phil Zhang and Yongzhong Wang, focused



on latest innovations made in the discovery and development of new therapeutic regimens, as well as the critical legal/IP/investment issues involved in the process.

Dr. Tarek Mansour delivered the keynote speech in the evening session, hosted by Dr. Zhao-Kui Wan of Pfizer. Reflecting the theme of the conference, Dr. Mansour enlightened the audience how to fundamentally define and measure true innovations with case studies including one FDA approved drug, one drug in advanced stage of clinical trial, and one drug candidate in early development stage as well some innovative methodologies derived from the drug discovery researches. Armed with a remarkable sense of simplicity and a great sense of humor, he made the complex chemistry details involved in each candidate drug easily understandable to all audience. As Dr. Yihan Wang, Associate Director at Ariad co-founders of CABA, put in a perfect way in his closing remarks – now it is time for us to think about how to bring real innovations to biomedical industry in US, China and all over the world. Especially for the young biomedical industry in China, which historically has strongly relied on outsourcing business, innovations will eventually determine its status in the rapidly changing global market.

In addition to the speeches and discussions, a vendor show was held throughout the day, which drew constant attentions from the attendees and extremely positive responses from both the vendors and the attendees. The organizers and the participating sponsors also put together a job fair at lunch time to benefit those who are seeking career opportunities. That proved to be another bright spot at the conference given the tough pictures of the current economy and job market.

Many attendees including Dr. Steven Projan, the Global Head of Infectious Diseases at the Novartis Institutes for BioMedical Research and Dr. John Piwinski, Group VP and Site Head of Schering-Plough, Cambridge (who both also presented at the conference) were impressed by the turnout on the Easter weekend and the high quality of the conference.

Dr. Jia Huang of Serica Technologies wrote afterwards, “The event was very successful! The organization and the quality of the speakers were of the highest level among all the similar events I’ve been to.”

Dr. Larry Wang, President of GenScript mentioned, “This is my first CABA meeting, and I am very impressed by the smooth organization and service attitude of the CABA team.”

Dr. Richard Soll, VP of Medicinal Chemistry of WuXi AppTec also presented and later wrote, “it was a great experience for me to be part of the CABA conference and I enjoyed the event very much. Excellent forum for current awareness and networking.”

Charles Huang, VP of Business Development of Sundia commented, “It is a great success! I would like to congratulate you for this significant event, and admire your effort and contributions to the drug discovery community, and the exchange of the US/China pharma/biotech industry.”

For the organizers, the conference did not end with merely patting on each other’s backs for a job well done. CABA’s leadership team, led by Dr. Junjun Wu, the Immediate Past President (2008-2009) and Dr. Zhao-Kui Wan, the President (2009-2010), began to set their eyes and minds on the future. Riding on the success of the annual conference, Dr. Wan and his team have subsequently and successfully organized multiple events in a row: “CABA Workshop on Clinical Trials & Regulatory Affairs” on June 13, and 30 at Harvard Medical School; “2009 Beijing Investment Promotion at Boston” on September 19 at MIT; “2009 CABA Technology, Investment and Entrepreneurship Symposium” on November 14 in Boston; “2009 CABA Medical Devices and Diagnostics Symposium” on December 5 at MIT, to mention just a few. For those who are interested in biomedical research, it will be definitely beneficial to regularly check out CABA’s website: www.cabaweb.org for the upcoming events. From the other end, CABA likes to say: “Stay Tuned!”