

Getting Ahead of the Curve

- Report of the 9th Annual Symposium on Biopharmaceuticals-San Diego Bio-Pharma Conference 2010

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The 9th Annual Symposium on Biopharmaceuticals-San Diego Bio-Pharma Conference 2010 was held on June 5th at the Del Mar Hilton. The event was

organized by

Sino-American Biomedical and Pharmaceutical Professionals Association (SABPA) and San Diego Chinese American Association (SDCAA) and co-organized with American Chemical Society, San Diego Section & UCSD Technology Transfer and Intellectual Property Services. At the end of the day, many of the 500 attendees felt as I did, re-energized, motivated and optimistic about the future of biopharmaceuticals in both the United States and China. I was in awe of the talents and expertise that both presented and attended the meeting. The appropriate title of this year's event was 'Getting ahead of the curve'. It is important to know where the curve is, that is the biopharmaceutical industry curve, and where you can fit in. The purpose of this year's event was to bring global experts together, and through a format of knowledge sharing and networking, to promote innovation, collabo-

ration and support advancement of Southern California's biopharmaceutical research and development.

Congressman Brian P. Bilbray, of the 50th District, California gave the opening address and suggested that there needs to be less stringent regulations by government to allow the development of 'miracle drugs' and that there should be a 'fast track' system for getting drugs to the people who need it now.

The title of the first morning session was 'Collaborative R&D-Industry and Academia'. Diego Miralles, head and Chief Medical Officer of Johnson and Johnson PRD, West coast, discussed the general trends of decreased productivity and increase in cost of R&D in the pharmaceutical sector. He stated that the pharmaceutical sector needs to adapt to the ever-changing environment and Johnson and Johnson is developing new business models to increase collaborations to increase the number of pipeline drugs for the treatment of unmet medical needs. Professor Xiaodong Wang, Howard Hughes Medical Institute, University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center then discussed apoptotic pathways and their therapeutic applications using small molecules. Dr. Wang believes that there will only be a real cure for cancer when we can understand potential resistant mechanisms and a combination therapy will be the ultimate treatment approach.



Dr. Nancy Chang



Dr. Diego Miralles

The second session of the symposium was a plenary discussion entitled 'Emerging Fields and Adapting Strategies'. Lewis Shuster, CEO of Shuster Capital introduced five outstanding panelists who each gave a short presentation of their perspectives reflecting life science activities ranging from the cutting edge of diagnostics and therapeutics to the challenges of delivering "personalized medicine" to current trends in venture capital funding of innovative new companies and products. Gregory F. Heath, Senior Vice President & General Manager, Diagnostics Business Unit, Illumina, discussed how the company has grown in the last 12 years and their future mission is to become the leading provider of integrated solutions that advance the understanding of genetics and health, and to improve human health by enabling our

customers to accelerate the collection, analysis and application of biological information. Steve Kaldor, President and CEO, Ambrx Inc. discussed the recent struggles that the pharmaceutical industry is facing, and why Ambrx Inc. is focusing on biologics. John M. Dunn, Executive Vice President of New Ventures, Biogen Idec Inc. said that his company has \$200 million to invest in new partnerships with academia and industry and is exploring new business opportunities. He said the main struggles facing the industry are declining revenue growth over the next few years, diminished R&D productivity, and finding an optimal balance of external and internal growth to fill the gap. The old system is not working and financing remains a challenge as both public and private valuations are down. Richard Neale, Chief Business Officer, Scripps Translational Science Institute discussed the healthcare reform, individualized medicine and its utility to physicians. He said that health care in the US is placed 37th in the world, yet the cost per capita is 2.5 X that of France, which is ranked, number 1. There is a great waste of money on drugs that are not working. With the new reform, personalized medicine may reduce costs, yet only 25% of physicians are educated on genetic testing. The session was ended by Robert More, General Manager, Frazier Healthcare Ventures who discussed the future of venture capital funding and the focus on funding unmet medical needs in our aging population.

Following a networking lunch in the San Diego sunshine, the San Diego Bio-Pharma Achievement award was presented by Xiangming Fang, President of SABPA San Diego, to Dr. Ge Li, Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer of WuXi AppTec. In 2000, Dr. Li started his own contract research organization (CRO) from scratch in China. The company went public in New York Stock Exchange in 2007. WuXi Tec employs up to 4000 people with more than 400 employees in the US and recently, Charles River Laboratories bought the Shanghai-based company in a \$1.6 billion cash-and-stock deal. Dr. Li stated that Charles River did not buy WuXi PharmaTech, but they merged, and this was part of his future vision for his company to become the leading global CRO, and not just in China. Dr. Li was also credited for helping to shape the CRO industry and usher in the new generation of biopharmaceutical R&D in China. He has also been an inspiring figure for young Chinese scientists.

The afternoon session was titled 'Drug Discovery in a Global Setting'. The first talk in this session was from Steve Yang, Vice President, Head of R&D, Asia, Pfizer. Dr. Yang shared with the audience first Pfizer's global R&D strategies, followed by his observations of the recent changes in the industry. He believed that there are very good opportunities for biotech and pharmaceutical R&D in China for the next few years. Dr Yang suggested that a metaphor of the current uncertain climate and evolution of the pharmaceutical industry is analogous to the evolution theory of punctuated equilibrium- Long periods of stability followed by short episodes of change.

'Combining the Best of East and West: Drug Discovery against the PI3K/mTOR Pathway' was the title of the next talk by Troy Wilson, President and CEO, Intellikine. Troy talked about his San Diego based company that is developing specific PI-3 kinase inhibitors. They have developed three clinical programs, in just three years with only \$30 million dollars and 23 people. The main reasons for his company's success in this turbulent climate is by having a network of pharmaceutical collaborators, outsourcing, innovation, the best team, an internal network and finally focus- they do a few things better.

The final session was a plenary discussion entitled '2010-2015: Stage 2 of China Life Sciences Industry' and was moderated by John Oyler. The panelists included Nancy Chang, Chairman and Sr. Managing Director, Asia, OrbiMed; James Tong, CFO, Chief Business & Development Officer, Tianyin Pharmaceutical, China; Xiaodong Wang, Steve Yang, and Guo-Liang Yu, President, CEO and Chairman of the Board, Epiteomics. The panelists each had to answer the question: what is their vision of the bio-pharmaceutical industry in the next 10 years? Responses included that technology



Dr. Ge Li receiving the award



Dr. Xiaodong Wang and John Oyler

may go beyond sequencing and the next challenge will be on how to harvest this information. There will be more holistic approaches to science and integrated technological platforms with greater translation from cells to the whole body. There will be a shift of focus from disease to health, and biotechnology will spread into other sec-

tors such as food, environment and non-medical fields. Dr Yang predicted that 40% of pharmaceutical growth would come from the Asian market as well as new food and biomaterials. The lack of constraints in science, in China will increase productivity and creativity.

To summarize, the bio-pharmaceutical industry is in turbulent period, new business models are being developed. Some will fail and some will succeed. It is certain regardless, that we will learn from this period. To continue with the evolution theme of Dr Yang, it is 'survival of the fittest.' The event was truly a success. Big thanks to the 27 sponsors of this event, the attendees, the speakers and last but not least the tireless effort of all the volunteers who have worked so diligently to put this outstanding symposium together. We look forward to seeing you all in 2011. If you would like to network, find out about the importance of science and opportunities in China please visit the SABPA website:
<http://www.sabpa.org/web>.

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