

## Conference Report

# Translational Research in Oncology Research & Development and Its Impact on Early Development in China: report of the 5th Annual Meeting of the US Chinese Anti-Cancer Association (USCACA) at 2013 AACR Annual Meeting

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## Abstract

In April 2013, the US Chinese Anti-Cancer Association (USCACA) held its 5th annual meeting in conjunction with the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) 2013 Annual Meeting in Washington DC. The USCACA executive committee reported activities and programs and highlighted the partnership and collaboration between USCACA and other major organizations. The key initiatives and programs of USCACA included 1) USCACA-TIGM Esophageal Cancer Program that funds translational research of esophageal cancer prevention and treatment at the Xixiang Medical University in Henan province, China; 2) the USCACA-NFRC-AFCR Scholarship Program, which has supported 10 young outstanding Chinese cancer researchers and will award 4 fellowships at the Guangzhou International Symposium on Oncology in November this year; 3) USCACA-Hengrui Training Program for Early Phase Clinical Research, which has supported the training of a Chinese scholar at two major cancer centers in the US; and 4) USCACA has continued its partnership with the *Chinese Journal of Cancer*, which has reached significant international impact.

## Washington DC-April 7th, 2013

The US Chinese Anti-Cancer Association (USCACA) successfully held its fifth annual meeting in Washington DC on April 7th, 2013, at the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) Annual Meeting. The theme for this year is "Translational Research in Oncology Research & Development and Its Impact on Early Development in China". Over 200 participants from academia, pharmaceutical and biotechnical industries, and cancer research organizations attended the annual meeting. Among the participants are Dr. Franklin Salisbury [President of National Foundation for Cancer Research (NFCR)], Dr. Sujuan Ba [President for Asian Fund for Cancer Research (AFCR) and Chief Operating

Officer of NFRC], and Dr. Frédéric Biemar (Senior Program Administrator, Stand Up To Cancer, Scientific Review and Grants Administration Department at AACR), who represented AACR.

The meeting accentuated collaboration among USCACA, Chinese Anti-Cancer Association (CACA), Chinese Society of Clinical Oncology (CSCO), State Food and Drug Administration of China (SFDA), NFRC, Tyler Institute for Genomic Medicine (TIGM), Xixiang Medical University, China, *Chinese Journal of Cancer* (CJC), and major Chinese pharmaceutical companies. USCACA committee announced recent successes of the organization and discussed, with a panel of distinguished opinion leaders, further opportunities to foster translational research and to facilitate oncology translational research and early clinical development worldwide, especially in China.

## Among the Meeting Highlights

### Dr. Wei Zhang reviewed the history and current standing of USCACA

After Dr. Roger Luo (USCACA Executive Committee

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member, Figure 1), the Chair of the Organizing Committee for the 2013 Annual Meeting, opened the meeting by a brief introduction and welcome to the invited guests and all attendees, Dr. Wei Zhang, the President of USCACA (Figure 2), gave his presidential address. He first provided an overview of the establishment of USCACA and the fast growth of this organization. He emphasized the role of USCACA in bridging close interaction of cancer researchers, clinicians, and pharmaceutical companies between the United States and China. Dr. Zhang also outlined the key initiatives and programs of USCACA, including the establishment of USCACA-NFRC-AFCR Scholar Exchange and Fellowship Program in Basic, Translational, and Clinical Studies, a highly successful partnership with NFRC and AFCR. The attendance of the presidents of NFRC and AFCR (Franklin Salisbury and Sujuan Ba) highlighted the commitment of these two major partners in the fellowship. Another important fellowship program is to sponsor the training scholars for early phase I clinical research, which was supported by Hengrui Medicine Co., Ltd.

Dr. Zhang then briefly addressed the success of *CJC*, the official PubMed-indexed English journal co-owned by CACA and USCACA in partnership with Sun Yat-sen University Cancer Center. With this successful partnership, 32 issues have been published so far, accompanied by a quick and steady increase in citations of papers published in this professional journal of cancer

research. Following the topic of *CJC*, Dr. Chao-Nan Qian (Figure 3), the Senior Associate Editor, gave his detailed presentation of *CJC* and announced that the unofficial impact factor (IF) of *CJC* has reached >1.0 in 2012. According to these progresses, it is expected that *CJC* would achieve a higher IF if it is indexed by SCI in 2013. Dr. Zhang then pointed out that 4 of the 5 issues for this year are organized by the USCACA Executive Committee members.

Dr. Zhang also introduced very recent initiatives of USCACA, highlighting the USCACA-TIGM Research Award to Xinxiang Medical University for translational research of esophageal cancer prevention and treatment. This program was subsequently reported in detail by Drs. Wancai Yang and Yunguang Tong. Dr. Zhang closed his opening speech by reiterating the importance, necessity, and urgency of promoting communications and collaborations among worldwide researchers, particularly between China and the United States, to win the war against cancer. Dr. Xi-Shan Hao, the Council Chairman of CACA (Figure 4), added on his remark on fruitful CACA-USCACA collaboration. Together with Dr. Hao, Dr. Zhang called for more and closer interactions between USCACA and CACA to accomplish our common mission "Bridging the United States and China to conquer cancer".

Dr. Zhang ended his speech by introducing the newly elected President of USCACA, Dr. Shiyuan Cheng, Professor in the Ken & Ruth Davee Department of



**Figure 1.** Dr. Roger Luo [US Chinese Anti-Cancer Association (USCACA) Executive Committee member), the Chair of the Organizing Committee for the 2013 Annual Meeting, opened the 5th USCACA Annual Meeting.



**Figure 2.** Dr. Wei Zhang, the President of USCACA, gave his presidential address.



**Figure 3.** Dr. Chao-Nan Qian, the Senior Associate Editor of *Chinese Journal of Cancer (CJC)*, presented the rapid progress, current standing, and future prospects of the *CJC*.



**Figure 4.** Dr. Xi-Shan Hao, the Council Chairman of Chinese Anti-Cancer Association (CACA), remarked fruitful CACA-USCACA collaboration and, together with Dr. Wei Zhang, called for more and closer interactions between USCACA and CACA.

Neurology, the Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine.

#### **Dr. Shiyuan Cheng announced the 2013 development plan of USCACA**

Dr. Cheng, the newly elected President of USCACA (Figure 5), began his speech by introducing all the Executive Committee members of USCACA. After briefly reaffirm the overall goal and mission of USCACA, he then presented the USCACA-NFCR-AFCR Scholarship Program in detail. Since 2010, more than 10 young Chinese cancer researchers, who were recently back to China from the United States, have received the scholar awards from USCACA and AFCR to support their continued cancer research in China and 4 more will be awarded later this year. He then announced the plans of official activities that have been scheduled so far for the year of 2013: 1) USCACA 2013 Annual Meeting at AACR, April 7, 2013, Washington DC, USA; 2) the USCACA special session on oncology at 2013 Drug Information Association Meeting, May 13–15, 2013, Beijing, China; 3) 2013 China Great Wall International Cancer Summit & Annual Meeting of CSCO, hosted by Chinese Medical Association, June 28–29, 2013, Beijing, China; and 4) USCACA-SFDA-CSCO-China NCI Oncology Drug Development Summit & 5<sup>th</sup> USCACA-NFCR Scholar Award Ceremony at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Guangzhou International Symposium on Oncology, November 7–9, 2013, Guangzhou, China. Dr. Cheng also called all USCACA members to join force in the attempt of promoting the *CJC* to become an SCI-indexed journal. He closed his inaugural speech with introduction of the USCACA collaboration models— Our Partners & Future Endeavors.

#### **Drs. Wancai Yang and Yunguang Tong introduced the USCACA-TIGM Esophageal Cancer Program**

Drs. Wancai Yang (USCACA Executive Committee member, Dean of the School of Basic Medical Sciences, Xinxiang Medical University) and Yunguang Tong (USCACA Executive Committee member), the principle investigators of the USCACA-TIGM awarded program for translational research of esophageal cancer prevention and treatment, reported the progress of this project.

Dr. Yang presented the scope of award and its impact, followed by introducing his team and the resources in Xinxiang Medical University where this project is homed in China (Figure 6). Xinxiang Medical University is the only standing medical university in Henan, a province with a population of more than 100 million people. There are more than 40 University-affiliated teaching hospitals with about 66,000 in-patient beds. Dr. Yang returned to Xinxiang Medical University from University of Illinois at Chicago in 2012 and has established his Research Laboratory for Cancer Signal Transduction. The USCACA-TIGM sponsored cancer research program focuses on gastrointestinal cancers, especially esophageal cancer, the most common and deadliest disease in the area of Taihang Mountains, including Northern Henan province, China. This particular region has the highest incidence of esophageal cancer in the world. Dr. Yang's lab has banked several thousands of gastrointestinal biopsy and resected tumor tissues as well as matched blood samples. This provides a fundamental basis for translational researches of Chinese high-incidence cancers, particularly esophageal cancer, among Xinxiang Medical University, USCACA, academia, and pharmaceutical industries in the United States and in China. These collaborative researches include the identification and validation of cancer type-



specific biomarkers and molecular targets for cancer prevention and therapeutic interventions.

Dr. Yunguang Tong (Figure 7) then introduced the collaboration model between USCACA and Xinxiang Medical University. USCACA will contribute to data-mining, genomic medicine, and clinical studies, and Xinxiang Medical University will perform preclinical validation and provide patient resources. Dr. Tong then updated the progresses of the project, which briefly include that 1) the research team has investigated esophageal cancer at transcriptomic, epigenetic, and genomic levels; 2) different levels of information have been integrated using integrative genomic approaches to identify biomarkers for esophageal cancer prevention and treatment; 3) a novel algorithm has been developed to prioritize candidate biomarkers; and 4) a biomarker database for esophageal cancer research has been established, and leading biomarker candidates have been found for further validation. Last, Dr. Tong introduced an ongoing project which combined data of gene methylation with gene expression in esophageal squamous cell carcinoma.

#### **Panel discussion on translational research in oncology research & development and its implication in China**

The last session entitled “Application of Translational Research in Oncology Research & Development and Its Implication on Early Development in China.” The invited guests from academia and pharmaceutical industries of both the United States and China actively participated in this panel discussion (Figure 8). These panelists included Drs. Chris Takimoto [Vice President (VP), Head of Oncology TM & ED Janssen Pharmaceutical Co.], Susan Pitman Lowenthal (VP of Medical Affairs of Oncology, Pfizer), Xi-Shan Hao (Council Chairman of CACA), Helen Chen (National Cancer Institute’s new Center for Global Health), George Wilding [Director of Wisconsin Comprehensive Cancer Center (WCCC)], Hua Mu (Executive VP & Chief Medical Officer, Hutchison MediPharma), Qing Dong [Chief Scientific Officer (CSO) of Hengrui Medicine Co., Ltd.], Li Yan (Managing Director of USCACA, Head of Clinical Development, Emerging Markets, Merck & Co, Inc.), and Li Xu (USCACA Executive Committee member, VP, Oncology Strategy, Implementation and Oncology Operations, Pfizer Oncology, Pfizer).

Dr. Michael Shi (USCACA Executive Committee member, Senior Global Clinical Leader, Novartis), the panel discussion moderator, opened the panel discussion on the topic of USCACA and SFDA/ Center of Drug Evaluation (CDE) Partnership by introducing the background about increasing



**Figure 5.** Dr. Shiyuan Cheng, the newly elected President of USCACA, announced the 2013 development plan of USCACA.



**Figure 6.** Dr. Wancai Yang (USCACA Executive Committee member), a Principle Investigator of the USCACA-Tyler Institute for Genomic Medicine (TIGM) Research Award, reported the progress of this program.



**Figure 7.** Dr. Yunguang Tong (USCACA Executive Committee member), a Principle Investigator of the USCACA-TIGM Research Award, introduced the collaboration model between USCACA and Xinxiang Medical University.



**Figure 8.** Panel discussion at the 2013 USCACA Annual Meeting. (left to right) Drs. Qing Dong, Hua Mu, Li Yan, George Wilding, Helen Chen, Xi-Shan Hao, Susan Pitman Lowenthal, Chris Takimoto, Li Xu, and Michael Shi.

experience from global clinical trials and the recognized gaps in early clinical development (e.g., study designs and executions), particularly lack of experience in First-in Human (FIH). He then raised the potential goals of this partnership: 1) to improve capability of early clinical development (particularly in FIH); and 2) to better understand biomarkers and their role in drug development. Drs. Hua Mu and Qing Dong then introduced translational research & early development in Chinese pharmaceutical companies. After the panelists addressed their insightful points of view on these issues, the discussion was open to audiences for questions, discussions, and comments. The panel discussion was concluded with Dr. Li Xu's update of Oncology Early Phase Drug Development Path in China: Draft Guideline of China SFDA "Deepening Reform of Drug Evaluation & Approval and Encouragement of Drug Innovation" from USCACA-CSCO-SFDA Joint New Cancer Drug Development Committee.

#### **USCACA presented the first certificate of training for early phase clinical research**

With the support of Hengrui Medicine Co., Ltd., USCACA has established a training program designed for clinical research staff including physicians, nurses, and pharmacists. The training program includes a scholarship to support trainees from selected cancer centers in China to rotate through clinical research units in the United States. The first recipient, Ms. Bin (Gaby) Gan from Guangdong General Hospital, attended the USCACA Annual Meeting. Dr. George Wilding, Director of WCCC, presented the training certificate to Ms. Gan. Dr. Qing Dong, CSO of Hengrui, congratulated Ms. Gan on her successful completion of training at WCCC and wished her continued success in the second part of training at Moffitt Cancer Center in Florida (Figure 9).

As Dr. Wei Zhang closed the meeting, he emphasized once again the significance of collaborations among cancer researchers and clinicians between the United States and China (Figure 10), as well as reiterated the goal and mission of USCACA. At the end of his



**Figure 9.** Drs. Qing Dong, George Wilding, and Li Yan congratulated Ms. Bin (Gaby) Gan on her successful completion of training for early phase clinical research at the Wisconsin Comprehensive Cancer Center.

closing remarks, he, on behalf of USCACA Executive Committee, welcomed cancer researchers and clinicians to attend the next USCACA annual meeting at 2014 ASCO annual meeting in Chicago.

#### **Washington DC-April 5th, 2013 USCACA Sponsored Two Major Events Hosted by NCFR**

##### **Panel discussion on US-Asia Targeted Cancer Therapies and Global Strategy for Clinical Development hosted by NCFR**

USCACA sponsored a panel discussion on "US-Asia Targeted Cancer Therapies and Global Strategy for Clinical Development" hosted by NCFR (Figure 11). Panelists from China, the United States, and Singapore included Drs. Jan Buckner of Mayo Clinic; Xuetao Cao, President of the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences; Zhu Chen, Chairman of China Medical Association and Former Minister of Health; Xi-Shan Hao, Council Chairman of CACA and President of Cancer Institute/Hospital of Tianjin Medical University, Board of Director of USCACA; Roy Jensen, Director of University of Kansas Cancer Center; Alex Matter, CEO of the Experimental Therapeutics Centre, Agency for Science, Technology





**Figure 10.** Partnerships among USCACA [(behind, left fifth to tenth) Drs. Wancai Yang, Michael Shi, Li Yan, Roger Luo, Yunguang Tong, Lingjie Guan; (behind, right first to second) Drs. Yun Dai and Weimin Qi; (front, left to right) Drs. Shiyuan Cheng (first), Li Xu (second), and Wei Zhang (fourth)], CACA [Dr. Xi-Shan Hao (front, left third)], National Foundation for Cancer Research [NFCR, Dr. Franklin Salisbury (front, right second)], Asian Fund for Cancer Research [AFRC, Dr. Sujuan Ba (front, right third)], and many other academia, pharmaceutical and biotechnical industries, and cancer research organizations in the United States and China.



**Figure 11.** USCACA sponsored the NCFR-hosted panel discussion on US-Asia Targeted Cancer Therapies and Global Strategy for Clinical Development. (front, left to right) Drs. Xuetao Cao and Franklin Salisbury; (behind, left to right) Drs. Sujuan Ba (fourth), Alex Matter (fifth), Zhu Chen (sixth), Xi-Shan Hao (seventh), and Li Yan (eleventh), together with the worldwide leaders in cancer research.

and Research (A\*STAR), Singapore; Scott Patterson, Amgen; Peter Vogt, Scripps Research Institute; and Li Yan, USCACA. Dr. Webster K. Cavenee, Director of Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research, San Diego branch and Professor of University of California, San Diego, and the former President of AACR, modulated the discussion.

The discussion focused on how to best take ethnic and genetic differences into consideration while developing new targeted therapies. Such differences are not only reflected in different drug metabolism and drug transport systems but also present as molecularly distinct cancer subtypes of the same organ origin. Targeted agent development needs to be customized to address these cancers or cancer subtypes uniquely prevalent in Asia Pacific. The discussants all agreed that closer collaboration should be centered in the following areas: 1) biomarker-adaptive clinical trial; 2) standardization of acquisition and analysis of biospecimens; 3) regulatory framework to test combinations of investigational drugs; and 4) center of excellence of clinical oncology trials in China. Dr. Zhu Chen also commented on the increasing pricing of some oncology drugs. He used the example of the deal reached last year between China healthcare providers with Novartis AG (NOVN) in which the company agreed to donate three doses of its leukemia

drug Gleevec for every one sold to the government. Western drugmakers may have to trade some of the profit on expensive cancer drugs to access China's "huge market."

### 2013 Annual Szent-Gyorgyi Prize Ceremony of NCFR

USCACA also sponsored a table at the 8th Szent-Gyorgyi Prize Ceremony of NCFR. This year the prestigious award went to Alex Matter, MD, CEO of the Experimental Therapeutic Centre of A\*STAR in Singapore, Member of the Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences. The award recognizes his fundamental contribution in the development of Gleevec. Dr. Zhu Chen, the former Minister of Health of China, the co-winner of this prize in 2012 (with Dr. Zheng-Yi Wang) introduced Dr. Alex Matter as the "Father of Targeted Therapy" and presented Dr. Matter with the prize. The prize ceremony was attended with worldwide leaders in cancer research and therapies in both the United States and China. Ten members of the USCACA executive committee attended the ceremony and had a pleasant greeting with Dr. Zhu Chen, Dr. Alex Matter, and worldwide attendees.