

SAPA Successfully Held Its 25th Annual Conference in Somerset, New Jersey

By Li Feng, Ph.D., J.D.

Somerset, New Jersey — The Sino-American Pharmaceutical Professionals Association (SAPA) hosted its 26th annual conference at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel and Conference Center in Somerset, New Jersey on October 5-6, 2018, in the occasion of SAPA 25th Anniversary celebration. The theme of the conference focused on “Bridging US & China’s Pharmaceutical Industries — Expediting Treatments for Patients” to fulfill SAPA four missions: science, education, collaboration, and career. The two-day conference, organized by all-volunteer pharmaceutical professionals, consisted of two morning plenary sessions and ten parallel sessions in the afternoon.



Opening remarks by SAPA President Dr. Jian Liu

The conference opened with remarks from Dr. Jian Liu, the SAPA President, Dr. Jijun Xing, Counselor Consul for Science and Technology, Chinese Consulate General in New York. Mr. Gordon M. Johnson, Deputy Assembly Speaker of New Jersey Assembly, joined at the end of morning session after an urgent meeting with New Jersey Governor Murphy. Mr. Johnson presented a Joint Legislative Resolution from the New Jersey Senate and General Assembly to congratulate SAPA on the 25th anniversary celebration.



Plenary speech by Dr. Joachim Frank, Professor, Columbia University, 2017 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry

The Day One plenary session featured on Cutting-Edge Technology to Expedite Breakthrough Therapies. Mr. Michael Nally, President of Global Vaccine, Merck & Co., highlighted the history of Merck's research and production of vaccines and examined the opportunities and challenges that Merck faces in pursuit of its goal to help patients in China. Dr. Joachim Frank, Professor, Biochemistry and Molecular Biophysics, Columbia University, who is a 2017 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, discussed cryo-electron microscopy of biological molecules and the future of structural biology, predicting that single-particle cryo-EM will achieve a

prominent position in structural biology. Mr. Paul von Autenried, Sr. Vice President and Chief Information Officer, BMS Digital, offered his vision on digital health and shared real-world examples of the impact of digital technology on patients. Dr. Chris Chen, CEO of WuXi Biologics, delivered a speech on developing world-class innovative technologies, promising to enable novel medicines to be accessible in emerging markets by manufacturing at lower cost traditional monoclonal antibody and novel bispecific antibody therapies developed using Wuxi Body platform. Dr. Nai-Kong Cheung, Head, Neuroblastoma Program, Enid A Haupt Chair in Pediatric Oncology, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, discussed engineering antibodies for cancer cure, projecting that antibodies, especially bispecific antibodies (BsAb), will provide curative options with minimal toxicity for cancers in children and young adults.

Five Parallel Sessions (A-E) followed the morning plenary session on Day One. In Parallel Session A (the SAPA Healthcare Investment Forum), investors and entrepreneurs shared their journey and experiences on life science investment trends in both US and China. Parallel Session B focused on Clinical Drug Development: Update on Recent Advancements and Challenges, where experts from pharmaceutical and biotech companies presented the latest advances and innovations in clinical development, especially in the immune-oncology field, and discussed the challenges, lessons, and latest trends in drug development for Alzheimer's disease. Parallel Session C focused on Regulatory Considerations for Generic Drug Bioequivalence Studies, where FDA and industry leaders and experts shared their insights and experiences on bioequivalence studies in the development of generic drugs. In Parallel Session D, investors, corporate BDs, and entrepreneurs met one-on-one in private sessions to facilitate potential business partnerships in biotech and pharma. The Job Fairs in Parallel Session E invited more than 40 companies with hundreds of job openings to look for pharmaceutical talents. At the same time, the Job Fairs Session provided a good opportunity for job seekers to scope out potential employers and obtain face-to-face access to hiring managers and senior managements who may become key contacts for the next career opportunity.



Plenary speech by Dr. Peter Marks, Director of CBER, FDA

The Day Two Plenary Session centered on the Evolving Landscape for Cell and Gene Therapies. Dr. Peter Marks, Director, Center of Biologics Evaluation and Research, FDA, discussed several pathways offered by the U.S. FDA, including a program for early non-binding regulatory advice, the INTERACT program, to assist sponsors engaged in product development. Dr. Samit Hirawat, Executive Vice President, Head of Oncology Global Development, shared the Novartis development program for Kymriah, as well as future directions in CAR-T cell therapy. Dr. Greg Russotti, Vice President, discussed cell therapy process and analytical development at Celgene and provided examples to demonstrate a data-driven methodology to assess whether the implementation of a new technology was worth the risk. Dr. Yuan Xu, CEO at Legend Biotech Co., provided an overview of the research and development of LCAR-B38M, a CAR T-Cell Therapy, and partnerships formed to further develop the drug candidate. Dr. Alex Zengjun Xu, Chief Scientist (Pharmacology and Toxicology), CDE, NMPA, discussed the status and challenges of CAR-T product development and relevant regulations by China FDA (CFDA).

The 2018 SAPA Distinguished Achievement Awards were presented to Dr. David D. Ho, Scientific Director and CEO of the Aaron Diamond AIDS Research Center; Irene Diamond Professor at the Rockefeller University, and Dr. Ge Li, Chairman, WuXi AppTec Group. Via video, Dr. Ho highlighted his legendary career on the development of HIV therapies and touched upon his collaborations with SAPA. Dr. Li made a powerful presentation on The Power of One, envisioning that one individual, one organization, one idea, or just one dream — is what the future can, and will be built upon so that “every drug can be made, and every disease can be treated.”



2018 SAPA Distinguished Achievement Awards winner: Dr. Ge Li, Chairman, WuXi AppTec Group

Five Parallel Sessions (F-J) followed the award ceremony on Day Two. Parallel Session F (the CEO Forum) provided a unique platform for the pharmaceutical executives to share their experiences and insights on the current and future challenges and opportunities in the pharmaceutical industry in the US and China. In Parallel Session G (the Business Development and Corporate Development Forum), business development and licensing experts shared their valuable partnering experience and opinions about the best practices in pharma partnering. Session

H provided a career development workshop on entrepreneurship. The panelists including entrepreneurs, investors, lawyers and incubator managers, shared a tremendous lesson with participants on how to start up own companies and move on. Session I of Market Access and Commercialization focused on the pharmaceutical commercialization functions and the critical roles of payers and healthcare systems on the market access and formulary decisions. Parallel Session J demonstrated the hot topic AI and Medicine, where experts in artificial intelligence and machine learning showcased how AI and machine learning can expedite drug discovery and development.



Left: SAPA 2018-2019 President, Dr. Xiaole Shen; Middle: SAPA 2017-2018 President, Dr. Jian Liu; Right: SAPA President-elect, Dr. Jerry Liu

The annual conference concluded in a dinner celebration of SAPA's 25th anniversary. About 200 guests, including past leaderships and representatives from regional SAPA chapters, toasted and reflected on the history, achievements, and future of SAPA. The SAPA leadership team successfully completed its transition with president office and executive council. Dr.

Wansheng Jerry Liu was elected by members as the 2018-2019 SAPA president-elect. The current leadership, including the immediate-past president, Dr. Jian Liu, Principal Scientist at Merck, president Xiaole Shen, Senior Scientist at Celgene, and president-elect Jerry Liu, Partner & Chair of China Practice at Fox Rothschild LLP, is confident in leading the organization to the next chapter.