Prof. Mingguang He: China has increasingly been recognized as the land for clinical research and innovation

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Mingguang He (Figure 1) is Professor of Ophthalmic Epidemiology at the University of Melbourne and Centre of Eye Research Australia. He completed medical school at the Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou followed by research training at Johns Hopkins University (MPH) and University College London (MSc and PhD). His research interests include clinical and epidemiological research, randomized trials, twin studies, and imaging technology. Dr. He has published more than 100 papers in the peer-reviewed literature and several book chapters. He has given more than 30 invited lectures at regional and international conferences. He serves as associate editor for Eye Science and an editorial board member for PloS One, International Glaucoma Review, and several Chinese ophthalmic journals. Dr. He has received several awards including a University College London Graduate Research Scholarship and Overseas Research Scholarship, Top 3 and Top 10 best poster awards from the World Glaucoma Congress in Vienna and Singapore, best paper presentation at the SEAGIG conference, and distinguished young scholar award from the National Natural Science Foundation. After the Zhongshan Medical Retina and Epidemiology Symposium, I was honored to have an interview with Dr. He. Here the interview goes.

YKXB: Dr. He! We learn that the global population suffering from blindness is rapidly increasing and you’ve been working against global blindness for years. Could you please inform us what are the leading causes of blindness? And approximately in which percentage of these blind people are curable and restore their sight again?

Prof. He: In 2014, the World Health Organization estimated that there are 285 million people visually impaired while 39 million are blind and 246 with low vision. The leading cause of visual impairment and blindness in developing countries including China is cataract. Uncorrected refractive error is also an important attributable cause for moderate and severe visual impairment. Roughly 80% of these diseases are avoidable either curable or potentially preventable.

YKXB: Now, you are an ophthalmologist from both Zhongshan Ophthalmic Center (ZOC) and University of Melbourne. Was there any significant joint project, you hosted, between Chinese and Australian ophthalmologists in recent 5 years?

Prof. He: Yes—in the past 3 years we have been working with Australian scientists, Ian Morgan and Kathryn Rose to design and implement a school-based clinical trial on understanding whether increased amount of outdoor time would prevent myopia in school-aged children. We are also working on a project, namely Australia-China Research Accelerator, with an aim to bring Australian expertise and scientists to China and help our Chinese partner hospitals develop their capacity on clinical research, linking them up to run multi-centre studies and bringing synergism and impact to the research society in both China and Australia.
YKXB: In what aspect of ophthalmology is there a booming potential for China-Australia cooperation in the next 5 years?

Prof. He: Australia has a lot of dedicated scientists, very good facilities and several well-documented research cohorts. They have well-established facilities and expertise on running high quality research. If we can develop research cohorts, working on the studies with similar aims and later on comparing the results in Chinese and predominately European people in Australia, it would generate unprecedented data to understand the diseases and the contribution of genetic and lifestyle factors. But this would need to make sure the phenotype collection in both Australia and China are comparable with similar definition and quality.

YKXB: To my acknowledgement, your team are doing SiDRP program. Could you please kindly introduce this program? Could you summarize the key points of how to screen the diabetic retinopathy in communities? What progress has been achieved in advanced countries, for instance, Australia?

Prof. He: SiDRP is a program hosted by Singapore National Eye Centre, trying to develop an efficient nation-wide program for diabetic retinopathy screening. We are running program similar in both Australia and China, but not exactly the same or part of the SiDRP. We are working with Lifeline Express Project on helping them develop DR screening program by providing cloud-based platform and also helping them develop reading centers, we are also working on adapting artificial intelligence based automated diagnosis in both Australia and China.

YKXB: Since 2016, APAO council permanently settles in ZOC, Guangzhou and you are the Deputy Secretary-General of APAO council. Could you expect, what positive impact of this event will bring to the development of ophthalmology in China in the near future?

Prof. He: APAO is a super-national organization with a mission to promote the development and to foster collaboration in the field of ophthalmology in the region. The APAO permanent premise relocating to ZOC in Guangzhou will become a good opportunity for ZOC faculties to interact with international experts, in terms of both clinical and management, which will improve the international profile of ZOC.

YKXB: The international collaboration and project between Chinese Ophthalmic Center and those from other countries is booming these years. However, there is saying that no innovation has made in China and Chinese foundation research is so poor that it only offers the free labor force for other contrives. What roles of Chinese institution especially ZOC are playing or would play you expect in the international collaboration in conquering the eye diseases with global institutions?

Prof. He: China has increasingly been recognized as the land for clinical research and innovation due to its densely populated patients pool, high volume serve providers and track record of efficient patient enrolment. We are never lack of innovation, we just need to more open to the world, and also develop our own system and culture that allows young generation to take lead and responsibility to run the innovative projects and ideas.

YKXB: The last one, we saw many frequently cited findings from you published on top-tier ophthalmologic journals, such as IOVS, Ophthalmology, etc. And you are a member of the Editorial Board of Eye Science and contribute a lot to this academic journal. In your opinion, what is the urgent task for Eye Science in order to increase its influence and catch up with peer journals with high impact factors?

Prof. He: I am serving the editorial board of Ophthalmology, Clinical Experimental Ophthalmology and Mol Vis. I can see lots of changes after the appointment of new management team. The priority/next step, should be restructure the editorial board by inviting prominent scientists to join the board, developing a dynamic mechanism allowing EBM contribute manuscript in particular review articles.

YKXB: Thank you so much for sharing your opinion and your valuable time.

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Footnote

Conflicts of Interest: The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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