

By: Binh H. Tran (Reporter, Today Daily News)
Translated into English for OGIRC

The Second Joint Conference of the Ontario Ginseng Innovation & Research Consortium (OGIRC) and Canadian Institute of Chinese Medicinal Research (CICMR) was held in Lamoureux Hall at the University of Ottawa in late October. The joint conference was sponsored by the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Western Ontario and the University of Ottawa; and co-sponsored by Research Western, Consortium for Globalization of Chinese Medicine, Ontario Ginseng Growers Association, Jamieson Laboratories, Afexa Life Sciences Inc, University of Manitoba.

This year's three-day conference focused on the production, pharmacology and health benefits of traditional medicines, and was attended by more than a hundred participants from Canadian universities, government research and regulatory agencies, the private sector involved in natural health products as well as participants from the United States and China.

Opening remarks for the conference were presented by Dr. Roman Szumski, MD, Vice President, Life Sciences Division of the National Research Council of Canada and Dr. Yung-Chi Cheng, PhD., Henry Bronson Professor of Pharmacology at Yale University School of Medicine and the Chairman of the Consortium for the Globalization of Chinese Medicine. This conference drew in scholarly speakers from universities across Canada, including senior scientists from McGill University, University of Ottawa, University of Manitoba, University of Windsor, University of Guelph, Dalhousie University, University of Montreal, University of Western Ontario and Loyalist College, as well as Chinese scholars Dr. Li Ping, MD, PhD, Professor and Director for the Department of Pharmacology and Associate Dean of the Institute of Clinical Medical Science at China-Japan Friendship Hospital and Dr. Ming Zhu, MD and Deputy Director at Beijing University of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Also presenting were researchers from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), the National Research Council Institute for Nutrisciences and Health and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). The industrial perspective of the R&D of traditional medicines was covered by Dr. Kan He, PhD, Director of Research & Development at Naturex Pureworld and Dr. Sharla Sutherland, PhD, VP Scientific & Regulatory Affairs of Afexa Inc (manufacturers of ColdFX).

Over the course of the conference topics covered included plant biotechnology, agricultural, ethanobotanical and pharmacological aspects of ginseng and other traditional medicines, clinical trials, development of Chinese medicine, education, and regulatory framework. Scholars exchanged research data on the effect of ginseng in varying medical conditions such as cardiovascular health, immune function, diabetes, cancer, and erectile dysfunction.

In his plenary lecture, Dr. Yung-Chi Cheng spoke to the potential, bottlenecks and approaches of developing future medicine based on traditional Chinese medicine noting, "Medicines [needed] today are no longer just for therapeutic purposes but also for prevention of diseases and improvement in quality of life. Traditional Chinese medicine has many of those characteristics and could provide for today's unmet medical needs and [as] the basis for development of future medicine". In order to facilitate the successful development of this new paradigm, Dr. Yung-Chi Cheng stressed the important collaboration that must occur among academia, government and industry around the world.

Closing remarks for the three-day conference were given by Dr. Ed Lui, Associate Professor at the University of Western Ontario, Scientific Director of OGIRC and President of CICMR. Dr. Lui extended his gratitude to conference participants for making the second joint Conference a success, highlighting the importance of Dr. Yung-Chi Cheng's heed for collaboration among academic and government institutions as well as the private sector in pursuing successful development of future medicines based on traditional Chinese medicine.