Letter from Washington

The Personalized Medicine Coalition (PMC) has proudly sponsored the Partners’ Healthcare Center for Personalized Genetic Medicine (Partners, MA, USA) annual conference on personalized medicine since 2005. This pre-eminent meeting on the subject also serves as the PMC’s annual conference, and brings together the leading figures in the field to explore opportunities, progress and challenges in science, business and policy.

Scheduled this year for the 9–10 November in the Joseph B Martin Conference Center at Harvard Medical School in Boston (MA, USA), the conference promises to provide unique insights into personalized medicine in keeping with its venue and its partnership with the Harvard Business School.

I caught up with Raju Kucherlapati (RK), PhD, Paul C Cabot, Professor of Genetics and Professor of Medicine at the Harvard Medical School, and the conference’s director, to ask him about plans for the seventh annual meeting.

Edward Abrahams (EA): How would you say the field has evolved since 2005; the conference’s first year?

RK: In 2005 many people were skeptical about personalized medicine. Some suggested that it would not have any significant impact on healthcare in less than 10–15 years. During the past 6 years; however, we have seen many examples of how personalized medicine products can improve medical care and reduce costs. As a result of these scientific and medical developments, an entire industry that serves patients has undergone a revolution. Nowhere is this more evident than in cancer care. The diagnosis, prognosis and care of many types of cancer depends on obtaining information about the genetics of the tumor. Several new drugs that use companion diagnostics have been approved, and others are awaiting approval from the US FDA. Many new business models that incorporate personalized medicine have emerged. There is a greater awareness and interest among policymakers of how personalized medicine can improve the quality of medical care at a reduced cost. All of these developments make me optimistic about the future, provided that we invest properly to make it happen.

EA: What are the themes for this year’s conference?

RK: This year we plan to take a close look at how the science underlying personalized medicine has the capacity to impact large populations, and have invited a number of distinguished speakers who can help us understand the power of the paradigm. They include Stephen Spielberg, MD PhD, the newly appointed Deputy Commissioner for medical products at FDA, and Fabien Calvo, MD PhD, Director General and Director of Research, French National Cancer Institute (Boulogne-Billancourt, France). We will also look at emerging business models for personalized medicine, hearing from David King, President and CEO, LabCorp (NC, USA), and Stephen Little, Vice President, Personalized Healthcare, QIAGEN (Hilden, Germany), among others.

EA: Why is this conference different?

RK: Because it is an international conference that focuses especially on the business of personalized medicine, the meeting attracts speakers and a diverse audience from around the world. Another unique component is the annual PMC Award for Leadership in Personalized Medicine, whose winner is invited to define his or her vision for the future of personalized medicine in remarks which are later published. A feature we began 2 years ago that has become very popular, the Harvard Business School Case Study on a topic of relevance to the field, adds a unique interactive component to the meeting. This year, with the rapidly declining cost of sequencing, it will focus on the development of these technologies and how they are likely to impact on medicine in the future.
“There is a greater awareness and interest among policymakers of how personalized medicine can improve the quality of medical care at a reduced cost.”
– Raju Kucherlapati

EA: What subjects will be addressed this year for the first time?
RK: I believe that the conference’s considered examination of how the new sequencing technologies are impacting personalized medicine will contribute to our knowledge of the subject, and raise relevant questions about the science, business and clinical importance of this new phenomenon. In addition to the Harvard Business School Case Study, we will hear from Kevin Davies, author of The $1000 Dollar Genome: The Revolution in DNA Sequencing and the New Era of Personalized Medicine [1], as well as executives from the Broad Institute (MA, USA), Partners, and Life Technologies (CA, USA) on this subject. The conference will also review how pharmacy benefit managers are embracing personalized medicine and their success to date in changing the care of millions of patients.

For more information about the conference and to register, please see http://pcpgm.partners.org/education/pmconference. PMC members receive a discount.

References


Edward Abrahams, President,
Personalized Medicine Coalition