

Prof. Min Li: three heads are better than one

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Editor's note

On June 17, 2018, the 4th International HBP Surgery Forum successfully ended, after a 4-day scientific agenda. The event took place in Hangzhou, a beautiful city located in China. With the presence of so many prestigious local and foreign experts, it has been an excellent conference, which is helpful to the therapy of hepatobiliary and pancreatic tumors, hepatic and gall diseases and pancreatic diseases and also enhances the exchange of ERAS, MDT and the relevant researches.

The conference was an excellent opportunity for the attendees to communicate and interact with prestigious local and foreign experts. During the meeting, we are honored to have an interview with Prof. Min Li, Assistant Dean for International Research Collaboration, College of Medicine, The University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, USA (Figures 1,2).

When talking about Prof. Li's research, he mentioned that their research focuses on pancreatic cancer and brain tumor, including early detection, finding new markers for pancreatic cancer and studying the mechanism. They are looking for therapy for pancreatic cancer, so they do basic research, translational research and a little bit clinical research as well.

About 12 years ago, Prof. Li and his team started a gene profile study, looking for many markers. At that time, Prof. Li was very interested in cell surface proteins, for the purpose of developing tumor vaccine and immunotherapy. During the profiling study, they found ZIP4 is the most important zinc transporter in pancreatic cancer. That's why Prof. Li came to be interested in ZIP4.

ZIP4, a zinc transporter, is aberrantly expressed in pancreatic cancer (PC), and promotes cancer growth and metastasis. It maintains the cellular zinc level at a very narrow range. Zinc deficiency often leads to cell and animal growth retardation, so zinc is the essential nutrition for the human body. As for down the road, Prof. Li addressed that they are developing a ZIP4 based targeted therapy, bringing down the expression of ZIP4 to treat PC.

When talking about difficulties, Prof. Li addressed that



Figure 1 Prof. Min Li.

there are difficulties during the study, such as funding difficulty, technical difficulty and so on. In the beginning, with limited personnel and limited budget, they can only focus on one molecule. So they decided to focus on the study of ZIP4, which turned out to be a success. In the beginning it's very challenging, this molecule has never been studied in any cancer so they didn't even have an antibody. In other words, nothing is available in the beginning. But Prof. Li and his team overcame these difficulties one by one through the whole journey.

Prof. Li also shared his opinion about training young medical professionals. He said that it's very important to train young investigators, surgeons, medical students and scientists and so on. He really enjoys the process of training young people and he can learn from them as well. So it turns out a win-win situation. What he learned from them is their motivation and hard-working attitude.

As Prof. Li has served as associate editor, Editor-in-Chief, and editorial board member for many peer reviewed scientific journals, including *Annals of Pancreatic Cancer*, and has published extensively in cancer research, he shared some take-home message about scientific writing and publishing during this interview. Prof. Li thought it takes a hard work of designing your project in the beginning. If in



Figure 2 Prof. Min Li: three heads are better than one (1). Available online: <http://www.asvide.com/article/view/26894>

the beginning your design has some serious flaw, your paper will go nowhere. He also mentioned that because of *Annals of Pancreatic Cancer*, he has a chance to collaborate with many other leading experts in this field. Prof. Li addressed that it's a great journal to bring all the people with different expertise from surgery, pathology and basic science, and to publish papers to exchange ideas. The scientific publishing is a very important bridge that connecting the science with audiences. So design your projects from beginning carefully, repeat them at least three times, and then write manuscripts and send to your peers and your co-authors to ask for expert opinions. Three heads are better than one. Afterwards, you can get all the pieces together to come up with a flawless manuscript.

Expert's introduction

Min Li, PhD, is a professor of Medicine, Surgery, and Cell Biology, and Virginia Kerley Cade Endowed Chair in Cancer Treatment. He is the Assistant Dean for International Research Collaboration, College of Medicine, Associate Director for Global Oncology at Stephenson Cancer Center, Director of GI Cancer Research, Department of Medicine, and Vice Chair for Research, Department of Surgery, at The University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center. He is a leading expert on pancreatic cancer. His research mainly focuses on studying pancreatic cancer (PC) pathogenesis and developing new therapies. Dr. Li's group has published more than 150 papers in the above mentioned research area. He has a track record of mentoring junior faculties, postdoctoral fellows, students,

surgical fellows, residents, and visiting scholars nationally and internationally. Dr. Li has obtained both federal (3 active NIH R01 grants) and private foundation grants to support his research. He is a member of many NIH study sections, and many other funding agencies, and serves as Associate Editor and editorial board member for many scientific journals. Dr. Li's group is the first to identify a key zinc transporter ZIP4, which is aberrantly expressed in PC, and promotes cancer growth, cachexia, and metastasis. ZIP4 (encoded by SLC39A4) is a zinc transporter, and plays an important role in maintaining the cellular zinc level by uptaking dietary zinc into the cells.

Interview questions

- (I) During the conference, you have talked about the translational cancer research. As we know, your researches have mainly focused on studying pancreatic cancer pathogenesis and developing new therapies. Would you please give us a general picture about your research work?
- (II) How did you come to be interested in ZIP4? How does it work to maintain the cellular zinc level?
- (III) What about down the road?
- (IV) In terms of difficulties you've encountered, can you talk about that?
- (V) You have a track record of mentoring junior faculties, postdoctoral fellows, students, surgical fellows, residents, and visiting scholars nationally and internationally. What's your view on the training of young medical professionals? Can you talk about your experience?
- (VI) You have served as Associate Editor, Editor-in-Chief, and editorial board member for many peer reviewed scientific journals, including *Annals of Pancreatic Cancer*, and have published extensively currently. May we ask you to share some take-home message about scientific writing and publishing?

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None.

Footnote

Conflicts of Interest: The authors have no conflicts of interest

to declare.

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