

## Dr. Lixin Zhu: disputes can present opportunities in medical research

Received: 17 December 2018; Accepted: 30 December 2018; Published: 25 January 2019.

doi: 10.21037/lcm.2018.12.02

View this article at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21037/lcm.2018.12.02>

### Editor's note

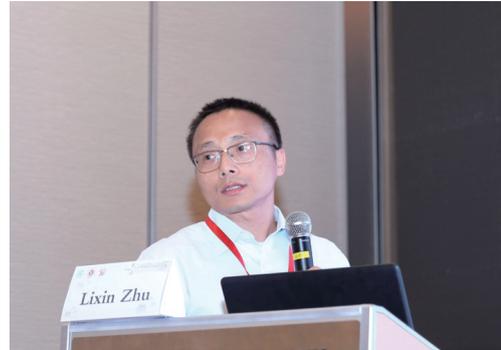
The 3rd Longhua International Forum on Digestive Disease was successfully held in Shanghai on December 1st to 2nd, 2018, gathering many leading experts and scholars in the area of digestive disease to share experience and techniques in this field. This meeting is of great significance to promote the deep exchange of diagnosis and treatment of chronic diseases with the combined therapy of Chinese and Western medicine.

Seizing this opportunity, we had the privilege of inviting Dr. Lixin Zhu (*Figure 1*), to have an interview.

With a history of more than 2,000 years, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is seen by many as a national treasure in China for its unique theories and practices, and plays an important role in Chinese healthcare system today. As for the advantages of TCM in treating digestive diseases, Dr. Zhu said there are two distinct aspects that western medicine cannot beat. One is that herbal therapies has been practiced a very long time and has apparently good results for patients. Second, TCM has less side effect. In the past, there were many synthetic medicines that were in the market for 10–20 years, and finally found that them caused serious problems. Many pharmaceutical companies do not want to spend too much on performing a long term study on the side effect.

Dr. Zhu also shared us his opinions on the use of biomedical knowledge to modernize traditional Chinese medicine. He thought that although TCM experts have put much efforts in modernizing TCM, it still has a long way to go to clearly clarify the mechanism of how does Chinese herbal medicine work. The diagnosis and the diseases itself are very complex involving many factors. It is one of the reasons why the research is difficult. In biomedical research, researchers can only focus on one factor. But in TCM research, there are more than one factors. Therefore, control experiences will be needed, which is very hard to control and design.

Regarding the latest advances in the diagnosis of



**Figure 1** Dr. Lixin Zhu was giving a speech on nonalcoholic fatty liver disease.

nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, Dr. Zhu said it is accepted by many doctors that the gold standard of diagnosing nonalcoholic fatty liver is still obscuring. But he observed that because studies also show that 90% obese patients have fatty liver. So, anyone who has BMI greater than 30 in Western population likely has nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD). But in Eastern area, people whose BMI is greater than 25 are considered obese, and have a similar risk for fatty liver.

However, doctors have not reached a consensus in this field yet. When we asked the comments on some controversial research results, Dr. Zhu said in scientific research, people may report different results and have different observations. There are many reasons for many different observations. For example, sample size can be one. He believed that this phenomenon could be a good thing. If there is a confusion or conflicting data in literature, it will present an opportunity for current science, which could shed new light on the current stalemate for researchers to advance the treatment for patients.

Dr. Zhu received the PhD degree from the Shanghai Institute of Biochemistry and later he went to American renowned medical university and institutes for further study and research. So, we were curious how did he see



**Figure 2** Dr. Lixin Zhu.

the differences on medical trainings in the two countries. Dr. Zhu said actually the differences are closing up. Many talents are coming back to China. Because the booming Chinese economy can provide more abundant research funding which is even better than many European countries. It seems that the situation has turning around.

In the end of the interview, Dr. Zhu shared with us a story which impressed him greatly during his medical training in America. He said once he and his friend attended a diabetes conference. At the Q & A section, his friend stood up and raised an issue related to that day's topic, questioning the speaker and asking for answers. By doing that, his friend was embarrassing the speaker. Dr. Zhu thought such kind of conflict situation is very rare in China, so he was shocked by the free atmosphere of academic interaction.

### Expert introduction

Dr. Lixin Zhu, PhD (*Figure 2*).

The Sixth Affiliated Hospital, Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, China.

Dr. Lixin Zhu has directed the Research Laboratory of Digestive Diseases and Nutrition Center at the University at Buffalo, as a tenure-track assistant professor, from 2009 to 2018, before he took an associate professorship at Sun Yat-sen University. Dr. Zhu received his PhD degree from the Shanghai Institute of Biochemistry, CAS. His PhD thesis was on the development of a vaccine against Hepatitis C. This work led to an invitation to work on Hepatitis C in the Laboratory of Dr. Gerd Sutter, Munich, Germany. Dr. Zhu then had the opportunity to do a Post-doctoral Fellowship at the University of California,



**Figure 3** Dr. Lixin Zhu: disputes can present opportunities in medical research (1).

Available online: <http://www.asvide.com/article/view/29593>

Berkeley. First he worked in the lab of Hsiao-Ping Moore and then moved to the lab of Dr. John Forte, an expert in the field of stomach secretion. Dr. Zhu gained experience with the techniques of investigating stomach secretion and stomach acid regulation. While continuing his interest in stomach secretion, he has embraced an ongoing project at the DDNC lab, the pathogenesis of non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH). During his time in Buffalo, Dr. Zhu has published 8 papers on stomach secretion, and 14 papers on NASH, two of which are considered landmark papers in the NASH literature.

### Interview questions (*Figure 3*)

- (I) What are the advantages of TCM in treating digestive diseases?
- (II) Would you like to talk about your opinions on the use of biomedical knowledge to modernize traditional Chinese medicine?
- (III) Would you like to brief us the latest advances in the diagnosis of nonalcoholic fatty liver disease in children? And what's the current ideal treatment in your opinion?
- (IV) What's your confusion about the studies published by other experts about nonalcoholic fatty liver disease? What's your comments on these controversial research results?
- (V) How do you see the differences on medical trainings in the two countries?
- (VI) Would you like to share with us the most special experience during your medical training in America?

## Acknowledgments

*Funding:* None.

## Footnote

*Provenance and Peer Review:* This article was commissioned by the Editorial Office, *Longhua Chinese Medicine* for the series "Meet the Professor". The article did not undergo external peer review.

*Conflicts of Interest:* The author has completed the ICMJE uniform disclosure form (available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.21037/lcm.2018.12.02>). The series "Meet the Professor" was commissioned by the editorial office without any funding or sponsorship. AY reports that she is a full-time employer of AME Publishing Company (publisher of the journal). The author has no other conflicts of interest to declare.

*Ethical Statement:* The author is accountable for all

doi: 10.21037/lcm.2018.12.02

**Cite this article as:** Yuan A. Dr. Lixin Zhu: disputes can present opportunities in medical research. *Longhua Chin Med* 2019;2:3.

aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

*Open Access Statement:* This is an Open Access article distributed in accordance with the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0), which permits the non-commercial replication and distribution of the article with the strict proviso that no changes or edits are made and the original work is properly cited (including links to both the formal publication through the relevant DOI and the license). See: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

## References

1. Yuan A. Dr. Lixin Zhu: disputes can present opportunities in medical research. *Asvide* 2019;6:008. Available online: <http://www.asvide.com/article/view/29593>

(Science Editor: Amber Yuan, LCM, [lcm@amegroups.com](mailto:lcm@amegroups.com))