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Unmet medical needs in eye care are huge in the Asia markets, and biotech companies will become increasingly important players and innovation drivers in this area

17.07.2020

Tags: China, Arctic Vision, Ophthalmology, Access, Innovation

Dr Qing Liu, Arctic Vision's VP for Clinical & Regulatory Affairs, shares her key priorities and the potential for top-line ophthalmological innovations in the Chinese market.

Qing, as a PhD trained in ophthalmology, what attracted you to this area of medicine?

I actually received the same question when I was interviewed by the supervisor of my Ophthalmology training. I think the answer remains same. We say that 'the eyes are the windows to the soul' because the quality of your vision can directly impact the quality of your life. During my earliest medical training, I was amazed at the fact that even though the eye is such a delicate organ and of very small size, it had an extremely complex structure and function. During my internship in the ophthalmology department, we saw patients of all different ages, from myopic kids to elderly people with diabetic retinopathy. It was clear that once their eye conditions were treated well and good visual acuity has been recovered, the impact to both their physical and mental health was extremely significant. During these moments, one profoundly understands and appreciates the importance and value of vision. Besides, those in the medical profession sometimes refer to this specialty as 'golden ophthalmology' due to the prestige of this field. Others have also said that only the best-performing students have the opportunity to join the field of ophthalmology. I am not sure if that is truly the case but I do feel very honoured to have been able

to pursue ophthalmology and after so many years in this field, as both clinician and industry professional, I am still deeply passionate about it.

Having worked across MNCs like Allergan and Alcon, including roles like APAC scientific lead and regional Medical Franchise Director for Asia & Russia, what have been some of your takeaways?

Throughout my industry career, I have been fortunate to have led the clinical development and medical work for different types of top ophthalmic products, from pharmaceuticals to OTC products, as well as medical devices (both Surgical and Vision Care), in China and other countries in Asia-Pacific, which is not very common in the China market. In addition, I had the opportunity to work with top-level KOLs in not only China but also in Asia and even globally through collaboration on clinical trials, publications, pipeline strategy, medical education, etc. This working experience in both leading ophthalmology companies has been such a great growth journey for me. I have learnt a lot but my biggest observations are that ophthalmology is an area full of cutting-edge innovation; unmet medical needs in eye care are huge in the Asia markets, and biotech companies will become increasingly important players and innovation drivers in this area.

As VP of Clinical and Regulatory Affairs, what is your top priority right now?

At the corporate level, we are focusing on building my R&D team and systems, and the evaluation of potential in-licensed assets to further enrich our pipeline with more innovative products. At the project level, of course we are focusing on the clinical trial preparation of our first asset, ARVN001 (known as XIPERE™ in US), a proprietary Triamcinolone Acetonide to be delivered via the novel Suprachoroidal Space (SCS) Microinjector™ for the treatment of uveitis associate macular edema (UME), and potentially DME and RVO. Uveitis is one of the leading ocular diseases causing blindness, but there has not been any approved therapy for UME in China yet, so we are working very hard on ARVN001’s clinical development right now and look forward to providing our product to uveitis patients as soon as possible.

We are constantly hearing about innovations in oncology, or new technology like cell and gene therapy, but what about in ophthalmology? After your first asset, ARVN001, what kind of new technologies does Arctic Vision want to bring to China in the future?

Ophthalmology is a niche specialty area and it’s true that not many big companies are working in this space. We are speaking about a handful of players like Novartis, Allergan, and Alcon but actually each of them has been always committed to innovation. There are also quite a lot of small biotech companies who have very good translational research ideas or even robust products adopting new scientific concepts and technology. Our product ARVN001, combining the new formulation of a classic steroid and the novel SCS injection platform for an improved safety profile, is a perfect example of such innovation. As you know, the first directly administered gene therapy approved by the U.S. FDA, Luxturna®, is for a rare form of inherited blindness. This shows how exciting this field can be and we at Arctic Vision are all very proud to work in an area where we can access and work on cutting-edge technology and science.

When Arctic Vision was established, the founding team held extensive discussions on our strategy and portfolio planning, which is fundamental for the company’s growth. In particular, we looked at the technologies and sub-disease areas we were interested in. Gene therapy was the unmissable space for everyone but as you can imagine, there are still many risks involved with gene therapies so we want to be bold *and* careful in our exploration here. It is a very hot area right now but we will undertake proper science- and data-driven evaluations of any technology we are interested in.

We also have a strong desire to develop new drug delivery mechanisms, which is very important for eye diseases. For instance, we could design better-penetrating eye drops or less invasive injections for the delivery of drugs to the back of the eye or longer-lasting therapies. There is a lot of potential for new innovations here.

We also want to address diseases affecting large patient populations, for instance, with vison care solutions.

Arctic Vision’s first in-licensed product, XIPERE™, has a novel drug delivery mechanism. How familiar would physicians in China be with global innovations or new technologies like that?

In general, ophthalmologists are very passionate about new technology and innovations. As I mentioned, most are also exceptionally trained, able to prescribe drugs and perform surgery. We have also received some preliminary feedback from KOLs. Some of them had already seen this technology in publications, and they are very excited that we are bringing this innovative product to China. For example: one professor has commented that our SCS technique would, for the first time, help overcome the side effects of intraocular steroids while still maintaining the potent anti-

inflammation efficacy, can’t wait to try it.

We are currently preparing for China Phase 3 clinical trials and we will provide our clinicians with comprehensive training so that they thoroughly understand our product and can master the injection procedure well. The injection itself has been proven to be very safe but we will still do our best to ensure the injection quality of our physicians and to protect the safety of patients.

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