Making the Impossible Possible – Insights From the Eye Hospital of the Wenzhou Medical University

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Education for all is globally spreading its silent footprints and each subsequent generation is aiming higher and higher. China invested heavily in education from 1997 onwards, resulting in a 5-fold increase in the student population within a span of mere 10 years from 1997 to 2007. More than 60% of high school graduates in China now attend university programs. For the world’s fourth largest country by area and with the largest population worldwide, making quality education available at every provincial level is an onerous task. Even the richest nations of the world usually represent a skewed distribution of education institutes with the most prestigious ones usually located in the biggest cities of the country. This issue of APJO features the remarkable story of the Eye Hospital of the Wenzhou Medical University (WMU) located in Wenzhou Prefecture of Zhejiang province in China.

The first ophthalmic optics laboratory in China was set up by Professor Tianrong Miao in WMU in the year 1978 followed by the establishment of the school of ophthalmology and optometry in 1988, and this paved way for the future Eye Hospital which was formally established in the year 1998. The Eye Hospital of WMU (Wenzhou Eye Hospital) is the first of its kind of eye hospitals focussing on ophthalmology and optometry in China. Professor Tianrong Miao himself has been a visionary scientist and clinician who has been renowned globally for creating the logarithmic visual acuity chart. A strategic combination of the fields of ophthalmology and optometry, otherwise conventionally pursued and practiced independently for more than 100 years in the US or elsewhere similarly paved the way for a more holistic and comprehensive eye care model benefitting patients as well as researchers. Professor Jia Qu, the current director of the Wenzhou Eye Hospital, has been instrumental in shaping up a cohesive unit working tirelessly with the vision to meet the unmet needs of comprehensive eye care, offering ophthalmic and optometric services all the time and keeping research and academics at its core. Relentless pursuit of excellence in basic as well as clinical research has resulted in the translation of research results from bench to bedside, awarding the eye hospital a unique distinction of being the only institution in the field of ophthalmology in China, which is home to 3 national research platforms, including a National Clinical Research Center, a State Key Laboratory, and a National Engineering Technology Research Center.

Currently, the Wenzhou Eye Hospital is one of the largest public ophthalmic and optometric centers in China and was ranked first in ophthalmology among all medical institutes in the Nature Index Ranking 2018. The Eye and Vision, a sponsored journal started by the Eye Hospital, boasts an impressive impact factor of 3.88 in just 5 years from its inception and is at the forefront of ophthalmology as a highly esteemed SCI journal. For Wenzhou as a small third-tier city in China, the Wenzhou Eye Hospital is the only tier 1 grade A speciality hospital in its province of Zhejiang with state-of-the-art national level research facilities all achieved in merely 2 decades since its inception. Working in close cooperation with the local government, the Eye Hospital also established the “Eye Valley” which is a 80,000 square meter incubator park and more than 5 hectare of a science innovation park integrating international ophthalmology and optometry, biomedical science, innovations in optical devices, ocular instruments and pharmacology, eventually to blossom into China’s own silicon valley in the field of eye care. Staying abreast with the speed of data transfer, the Wenzhou Eye Hospital also initiated the first 5G enabled telemedicine project in China to offer remote consultations to patients in rural areas. It has also established the China Wenzhou model which has resulted in training nearly 4000 specialists in eye care to the magnitude that over 1 in 10 eye specialists in China is an alumnus of the Wenzhou Eye Hospital.

The Wenzhou Eye Hospital has successfully attained key elements of a world-class institute such as Moorfields Eye Hospital in London/UK, Bascom Palmer Eye Institute in Miami/US, or Doheny Eye Institute in Los Angeles/US, despite being located in a much smaller and formerly remote location to serve as a beacon and an example of success from scratch and proving that impossible is indeed possible. The integrated approach of ophthalmology-optometry initiated at...
the Wenzhou Eye Hospital has helped nurture MD-level new talents who focus and treat patients with eye problems more comprehensively. The larger good perhaps may not lie in the under-reported but often felt battle between these 2 fields, but instead in the approach laid down by the Wenzhou Eye Hospital. Indeed, under the mastermind and command of Professor Jia Qu, the engagement with diversity pursued by this integrated approach has resulted in a productive and rewarding endeavor. Such an approach which has been shown to be good for China, may also be good for other parts of the world.

As the Wenzhou Eye Hospital marches into a new era of evolving challenges, it pursues the founding mission of “making the impossible possible” whereas advancing patient care and research to the next level. This young, vibrant, and passionate eye hospital is determined to harness increasingly pivotal roles and shine at the global stage as a top-notch Chinese center dedicated to the best eye care and research. It is under the visionary and able leadership of Professor Jia Qu that the Wenzhou Eye Hospital has developed from scratch to where it is today in only 2 decades. Such achievements are phenomenal! We feel this story of the Wenzhou Eye Hospital would be a good read and inspire leaders and readers around the world to aim high and achieve the impossible. We would like to conclude by sharing the quote that “Whatever imaginable is achievable and today’s unthinkable could be tomorrow’s invention.”

REFERENCES


