Research Mission to China

FEBRUARY 25 – MARCH 5, 2009
“...an opportunity to collaborate with highly qualified personnel, to enhance research capacity and productivity, to compete successfully for grants requiring international partnerships.”
Background
CAHO has been interested in the potential for partnerships in health science research with colleagues in China, since participating in the Premier’s Trade and Investment Mission to China in 2005. At that time, Sheila Jarvis, representing CAHO, met with academic leaders in Faculties of Medicine in several high caliber universities in Hong Kong and China. Ideas for joint collaboration in research were initiated at those meetings.

The appeal for research collaboration with China is compelling: an opportunity to collaborate with highly qualified personnel, to enhance research capacity and productivity, to compete successfully for grants requiring international partnerships. While all economies are challenged today, China’s economy remains strong and their government endorses a research and innovation agenda. Some of China’s leading universities are internationally accredited in the clinical trial field with well established links to industries worldwide.

CAHO, as an umbrella organization representing Ontario’s academic hospitals and hospital affiliated research institutes where 80% of health research in Ontario takes place, is in an excellent position to help initiate, coordinate, support and track the success of research collaborations with China.

The Ministry of Research and Innovation has supported CAHO in this endeavor by sponsoring two subsequent visits to China in 2006 and again in 2009, led by CAHO members Dr. Kevin Smith and Sheila Jarvis to pursue a joint program of research collaboration. University leaders in China have also expressed interest in joint educational programs for executive leaders of academic hospitals.
The 2009 Visit
Prior to the 2009 meetings in China, the Ministry of Research and Innovation identified specific research areas of interest for collaboration with China in six thematic areas: genetics of disease, stem cells, cancer, infectious diseases, respiratory diseases and biomedical devices. These areas were validated by the Council of Ontario Research Directors (CORD) of CAHO.

The 2009 site visits included meetings with six leading universities and their affiliated teaching hospitals:

- **Hong Kong**
  - The Chinese University of Hong Kong
  - The Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine at University of Hong Kong

- **Shanghai**
  - Fudan University
  - Jiao Tong University

- **Beijing**
  - Capital Medical University
  - Peking Union Medical College.

Measures of Success
Enthusiasm in China for a partnership with Ontario universities, their academic hospitals and research institutes is high. There is widespread agreement that our success should be evaluated based upon joint grant applications, joint research projects and joint publications. Joint exchange of post doctoral students, who would spend some time in each partner setting, is seen as a key ingredient to long term partnership success.
Research Themes
The underlying research themes of common interest that emerged from these meetings were remarkably consistent with our proposed themes. The basic science themes are:

- inflammatory response
- the genetic basis of disease
- stem cell biology and regenerative medicine, inclusive of paediatrics.

Similarly, from an organ system/disease state research paradigm, the areas of principle interest were:

- cancer with a focus on liver, lung, breast, GI and blood,
- respiratory diseases, and
- infectious diseases.

Scientific Symposium
A meeting to “kick start” the collaboration would be a symposium to be held in Ontario. The value of such a joint scientific symposium was strongly supported as a mechanism to launch specific research partnerships. The proposal is to convene an invitational meeting of selected researchers from Ontario and China who lead research focused in the thematic areas described above. Such a meeting would require researchers to identify the key areas of exploration they wish to undertake in the next three to five years. Each researcher would be given no more than 10 minutes to define their stated future direction and hypothesis of interest. The symposium would include time for researchers to meet and through a facilitated process create joint hypotheses on questions of mutual import from which a joint grant application would be realized. This research collaboration would see postdoctoral students spending time in the environments of the co-lead investigators.

Site visits to Ontario research laboratories will be arranged for the visiting delegation.

Sponsors for this three day meeting would be sought in Ontario and China. The Ministry of Research and Innovation has indicated interest. The expenses of all participants would be the responsibility of the delegates themselves.
Concurrent Symposium
A consistent theme that emerged from the Deans and Health System Leaders was the benefit of a concurrent “Leaders Meeting” which focuses on creating highly efficient clinical environments while promoting academic excellence.

A meeting of Deans of Health Science Faculties and chief executives of academic hospitals would be convened for the purpose of exploring how system leaders might better support the academic enterprise while struggling to meet an ever increasing and complex clinical demand. A request for a meeting of this kind was expressed by our Chinese colleagues as they embark upon the development of a number of academic institutes (e.g. neurosciences, paediatrics, etc.) and struggle to meet an increasing population demand for clinical services. To this end, the Ontario academic hospitals were seen as having found an enviable model in which scholarship and clinical excellence has been integrated.

Next Steps for CAHO
2. a) Identify research leaders and confirm their wish to participate in targeted research themes within CAHO institutions, and corresponding Chinese organizations
   b) Identify CAHO leads for Symposium (CORD members, Jarvis, Smith and colleagues)
   c) Identify potential partner organizations for the Symposium
3. Complete researcher surveys and biographies, and exchange between CAHO and China
4. Identify potential granting agencies for Ontario-China initiatives
5. Initiate the “e-connections” between potential collaborators, and possible site visits to foster pre-Symposium dialogue
The CAHO office is located at:
200 Front Street West, Suite 2501
Toronto, Ontario Canada
M5V 3L1

Visit our website:
www.caho-hospitals.com

Members – Council of Academic Hospitals of Ontario

- Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario
  Ottawa, ON
- Bruyère Continuing Care
  Ottawa, ON
- University Health Network
  Toronto, ON
- London Health Sciences Centre
  London, ON
- Providence Care
  Kingston, ON
- Kingston General Hospital
  Kingston, ON
- Centre for Addiction & Mental Health
  Toronto, ON
- The Hospital for Sick Children
  Toronto, ON
- Hotel Dieu Hospital Kingston
  Kingston, ON
- Baycrest Centre for Geriatric Care
  Toronto, ON
- Bloorview Kids Rehab
  Toronto, ON
- North York General Hospital
  Toronto, ON
- Women’s College Hospital
  Toronto, ON
- Hôpital Regional de Sudbury
  Sudbury Regional Hospital
  Sudbury, ON
- The Ottawa Hospital
  Ottawa, ON
- Royal Ottawa Health Care Group
  Ottawa, ON
- Mount Sinai Hospital
  Toronto, ON
- Hamilton Health Sciences
  Hamilton, ON
- St. Michael’s Hospital
  Toronto, ON
- St. Joseph’s Health Care, London
  London, ON
- Toronto Rehabilitation Institute
  Toronto, ON
- Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre
  Thunder Bay, ON
- St. Joseph’s Healthcare Hamilton
  Hamilton, ON
- Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre
  Toronto, ON
- Hôpital Montfort
  Ottawa, ON