

Academic institutes and companies join forces to boost precision nutrition research

November 9, 2017 | News

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Biological research institutes have forged an alliance with precision nutrition companies to boost application-oriented research that could create the cure to some chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.

During an academic conference in Shanghai on precision health and nutrition, the Shanghai Institute for Biological Sciences at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Chinese dietary supplements maker By-health, German chemical company BASF and the Netherlands Organization for Applied Scientific Research signaled the start of their collaboration by signing a memorandum of understanding.

The alliance will set up a fund to sponsor research on precision nutrition while the companies involved will help researchers commercialize their findings.

Instead of curing patients who are suffering from a disease, precision health aims to prevent people from getting sick through customized diet and nutritional supplements.

In July, China's State Council released a plan that aims to improve the health levels of its citizens. The plan revealed that many Chinese today are facing diseases related to insufficient and excessive nutrition.

"The biggest challenge comes from chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension. There are at least 100 million Chinese suffering from diabetes and the figure for hypertension patients is even higher," said Chen Yan, the deputy dean of the Shanghai Institute for Biological Sciences.

"Precision nutrition is a promising industry, but it is still in a nascent stage. We started this alliance to help companies create products that are backed by substantial scientific research," he added.

Zhang Xuguang, director of By-health's research center, pointed out that the effectiveness of medication and nutritional supplements for diabetes patients is low because these products were not specifically designed to address problems caused

by the disease.

As such, By-health is working with scientists to provide quick diagnosis methods and dietary supplements that are specifically tailored for those with diabetes.

"Chinese people like to say: 'Eat less, exercise more'. But what exactly do 'less' and 'more' mean? These are questions that precision health research will help answer," said Lin Xu, director of Basic Nutrition Research Branch at Chinese Nutrition Society.

Frank Hu, professor of public health at Harvard University, said that although precision nutrition could help individuals better address their health problems, the government should also play a role by constantly reviewing the regulations for the food industry and creating health guidelines for the public.