Let's Try It: Me for You

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THE LIVES OF RESEARCHER, CLINICIANS, and advocates are filled with conferences these days. Hundreds of conferences, meetings, and workshops focus on the topics of this journal, genetic testing and molecular biomarkers, alone. Even the topic of rare genetic diseases, formerly an underserved area, spawns dozens of meetings every year. Thus, in this morass, it is very rare that a meeting is significant enough to leave a lasting impression.

My experience at the OME Precision Medicine Summit (University of California, San Francisco, 2013) stands out as extraordinary. University of California Chancellor Susan Desmond-Hellman convened about 150 people for this 2-day summit on May 1 and 2, 2013. It was extraordinary in both the participants it engaged and the format. I left feeling sure that our time had not been wasted and that this was not the end of the fruit of our time together.

IDEO, a design and innovation firm that does a great job of engaging people through thoughtful design and interaction, facilitated the meeting. This meant no keynote speeches, no self-laudatory ramblings, and no pitches to sell the audience on an idea. In fact, there was no audience, only participants. This was a good harbinger of one of the outcomes, participation by all in the health arena—patients would not be relegated to the “audience.” This also meant that as we sat around large tables that fanned out from a central platform, there would be no hiding in one’s email or finishing this perspectives piece on time!

In fact, the 150 participants were engaged enough in the process to contribute equally to working together on ideas that would transform precision medicine. These participants came from all over the world, and although most are in the CEO position or equivalent in social media, consumer health, academic medicine, federal and international agencies, and even supermarkets, everyone hunkered down and worked side by side with vigor and enthusiasm over the 2 days. As an example of the diversity, active participants included National Institutes of Health Director Francis Collins; Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Margaret Hamburg, MD; founder and CEO of 23andMe entrepreneur Anne Wojcicki; GE healthymagination CEO Sue Siegel; Institute of Medicine President Harvey Fineberg, MD; Milken Institute founder Michael Milken; and Safeway CEO Steven Burd. We worked in novel configurations on four topic areas: data, discovery, health and care, and stewardship. Facebook

founder Mark Zuckerberg stopped by to comment on our work. Governor of California Jerry Brown attended the final, venture capital-style pitches of the projects and products proposed and designed over the 2 days.

Throughout the 2 days, our ideas and designs were winnowed down into pitches and finally into commitments from all of us to the winning pitches to carry the ideas forward with each other and other enthused citizens beyond the small group. Kudos are certainly due to IDEO for managing such an eclectic group of type A personalities. But perhaps the most significant element in the experience was the vision of Susan Desmond-Hellman. In her opening remarks, she was not afraid to make the quest for precision medicine, and through it, better health, personal. She also expressed her excitement and gratitude for all of us spending 2 days with our sleeves rolled up. Dr. Desmond-Hellman challenged herself and all of us to connect “the dots in a new, data-driven way so we can understand the underlying biology.”

What does this have to do with genetic testing and molecular biomarkers? A lot. Throughout the meeting, in every workgroup and constellation of innovators, there was vigorous discussion about what to measure, how to measure, methods of data transfer, analysis and synthesis, and finally communication back to participants from whence the data come. Genetic testing is a key element in an age of precision medicine as the standard of practice. It begins to be well integrated into other measures, including quantified self- and microbiome-data captures. In the most compelling pitches, genetic and genomic testing was no longer the problem or focus but was part of the whole picture and offered a path to better health. Molecular biomarkers became integrated measures that allowed real-time feedback with actionable recommendations to optimize those measures.

The papers in this journal, this month and every month, are part of the march toward a future of precision medicine and will contribute to realize the promise of deciphering the human genome. Francis Collins, a primary force behind that deciphering, as he labored in his work group at OME, commented on the power of using the tools we have today and pushing farther together. Although this meeting was filled with luminaries and visionaries, the most important point of the meeting was not the august star power but the need for all of us to focus on health and prevention, and to work together to that end.

In one of the rapid-fire commentary sessions, I commented that it was important that we build the future for the WE, that all of us need to remember there is no 'they', the solutions will only come when we build the WE. That theme ran throughout the meeting, ending with Dr. Desmond-Hellman's rallying us with a new movement called Me for You (Me For You, 2013). This movement calls all of us to create a healthier future for those we love. It is important to remember why we do what we do. Join the movement!

References

Me For You (2013) Available at: <http://www.meforyou.org/>
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University of California, San Francisco (2013) OME 2013 yields pilot proposals to advance precision medicine. Available at: <http://www.ucsf.edu/news/2013/05/105706/ome-2013-yields-pilot-proposals-advance-precision-medicine> Accessed May 20, 2013

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