Determination of high folate concentrations should be considered when re-fortifying folic acid supplementation and fortiﬁcation policies. Future research on the relationship between high folate concentrations and health outcomes is warranted.

1.6 COHORT STUDIES AROUND THE WORLD: METHODOLOGIES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND INTEGRATION TO ADDRESS THE EMERGING GLOBAL EPIDEMIC OF CHRONIC DISEASES

Chair: Prof Donna Spiegelman, USA
Discussant: Prof. David Hunter, USA

Rapid economic developments accompanied by environmental and lifestyle changes over the last 3 decades in China have resulted in dramatic increases in the incidence of chronic diseases such as cancer and cardiovascular disease. As a result, cancer and cardiovascular disease are two of the leading causes of death in China. This change in disease spectrum presents an enormous challenge to public health practitioners and policy makers in designing cost-efﬁcient strategies for disease prevention. To identify reasons for the increased risk of chronic disease in China and investigate etiologic hypotheses that cannot be adequately evaluated in other populations, we launched the Shanghai Women’s Health Study in 1996 and the Shanghai Men’s Health Study in 2001. In collaboration with community health workers, the Shanghai Women’s Health Study recruited 75,049 women aged 40–70 from 7 communities in urban Shanghai between 1997 and 2000 with an overall response rate of 92%. Using a similar protocol, the Shanghai Men’s Health Study recruited 61,900 men aged 40–74 from 3 communities in Shanghai with a response rate of 75% for study participation. Biological samples were collected from the vast majority of study participants. All study participants were interviewed using a structured questionnaire to obtain information related to their usual dietary intake, physical activity, and other lifestyle factors. These two cohorts are being followed through a combination of biennial in-person surveys and record linkage with the Shanghai Cancer Registry and Shanghai Vital Statistics database. In addition to ascertaining health outcomes, we also obtain exposure data as part of the follow-up surveys.
An epidemic of chronic, non-communicable diseases is growing in Africa. By 2050, according to the WHO, three of the top four causes of death in low-income countries will be heart disease, stroke, and chronic lung disease. No large scale epidemiologic studies investigating chronic diseases have been conducted in Africa.

PaCT, a component of the Global Epidemiology Initiative established at the Harvard School of Public Health, is an ambitious project which will investigate chronic, non-communicable diseases among 500,000 people from four African countries over the next 20 years. This initiative will also provide training opportunities for African researchers. PaCT includes scientists from universities in South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania, Nigeria, as well as Harvard University. Pilot studies are being conducted in all four of these countries.

An initial cross-sectional baseline survey, with 6 month longitudinal follow-up was planned. We aimed to recruit 800 school teachers employed at public schools within the CapeTown metropolitan area. After returning a self-administered questionnaire and completed consent forms, teachers were visited at the schools by trained nurses who took physical measurements (weight, height, waist circumference and blood pressure) and collected biological (blood and urine) samples.

Our presentation will provide a brief overview of PaCT activities in the four African countries involved. It will then focus on practical challenges encountered in the pilot studies and how they were addressed, with special reference to the South Africa pilot study. These challenges include funding procurement, standardisation of methods across countries, obtaining approval for the study, participant recruitment, data collection and analysis.