



BIOTECH BULLETIN



Collaboration is Core to Baltimore's Bio Success

[By Jim Hughes]

Collaboration between the private sector, public sector, and academic research institutions in the Baltimore-Washington region has helped create a booming bioscience industry. Maryland has the fourth-largest concentration of biotech companies in the country and is growing steadily. With the development of their research parks, the two largest employers in the city of Baltimore, the University of Maryland and Johns Hopkins University, expect that the addition of life-science companies to their facilities will add considerably to the density of bioscience in the state.

Brad McDearman, executive vice president of the Economic Alliance of Greater Baltimore, interviewed more than 40 bio leaders in the region as part of a bioscience report that was released last month. The findings indicate that while biotech companies located on the east coast have connections all over the world – exactly as we thought – their primary collaborations are with venture capitalists, clients, and strategic partners based in the Northeast. McDearman notes, for example, that many of the Baltimore-based biotech firms he surveyed receive funding from venture capitalists in Boston or New York and work with academic partners at Penn, MIT, Columbia, as well as here in Baltimore at the University of Maryland and Johns Hopkins.

The collaboration between industry and academic sectors, as well as support from federal agencies like the National Institutes of Health (NIH), has produced an environment that stimulates new ideas and concepts, as well as business opportunities and breakthroughs, while creating lasting benefits to the area. The Baltimore region's two new BioParks will add needed wet lab space, draw highly trained workers, further boost research-heavy academic medical centers, and provide economic development to the area as a whole.

The expansion of the biotech sector in Baltimore has led not only to a growth in jobs, but also a revitalization of the areas around the universities and BioParks, with new housing and retail development planned to accommodate the expanding

economy. Areas that were nearly forgotten are transforming into thriving neighborhoods with new residential and commercial development which will lead to greater revenue for the city and state.

While an area profits financially from nearly any business growth, the benefits from collaboration between the academic and private sectors aren't always as symbiotic as they are in the bioscience industry. Start-up companies locating in this region gain unparalleled access to expert university faculty and state-of-the-art facilities-including laboratories, equipment and graduate students-resulting in cost savings by reducing the need to buy specialized equipment and hire employees for short-term studies. And the university faculty is afforded the opportunity to perform research that leads directly to the commercialization of technology. This provides them with better insight into the market needs and best practices in the commercial sector, which translates into greater efficiency in converting basic science to medical breakthroughs. In addition, the collaboration between university researchers and pharmaceutical companies' work will frequently assist in the generation of publications, which can greatly benefit university faculty members' careers.

Though pharmaceutical companies are making incremental improvements, many of the truly innovative, paradigm-changing discoveries are occurring at universities. At the University of Maryland Baltimore (UMB)

alone, there are more than 1,200 research faculty who are engaged in hundreds of biomedical research projects. Each year, its researchers make 100 to 120 discoveries that have commercial potential, and while only a handful will become successful products, these discoveries are critical to filling the pipeline.

Alba Therapeutics is a Baltimore-based company that has utilized a university affiliation to license a promising new drug for auto-immune disorders. The company's development and discovery operations are housed at UMB BioPark, which has provided numerous advantages for them including access to a facility that was designed with their unique needs in mind, with room to grow, as well as support from the university and state and physical proximity to the drug's scientific founder. The collaboration between Alba and UMB has created a potentially life-altering drug for individuals suffering from autoimmune and inflammatory diseases such as Celiac Disease. Alba's lead drug candidate is entering a Phase IIb clinical trial for Celiac Disease this quarter after being fast-tracked by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA).

Collaboration between the private sector and academic research institutions is the key driver for the growth and development of the Baltimore-Washington region's bioscience industry. Collaborations including commercializing technologies, conducting joint research and clinical trials, faculty providing consulting expertise to companies,

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and corporate executives serving as adjunct faculty at universities can benefit both industry and academia while simultaneously helping the area through economic development.

As President of the University of Maryland Baltimore (UMB) BioPark, I'm naturally excited (and admittedly a little biased) when I look at the Economic Alliance of

Greater Baltimore's findings, as well as the progress that's already been made in the region's biotech community. We recognize that collaboration between the private sector and academic research institutions is critical for the growth and development of the bioscience industry, regardless of whether the geographic footprint is UMB, the Washington-Baltimore region, the Northeast Corridor, or anywhere around the globe.

About the Author

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