

**EP.58 - Alex Philippidis FINAL**

**Narrator:** You're listening to *BioTalk* with Rich Bendis, the only podcast focused on the BioHealth Capital Region. Each episode, we'll talk to leaders in the industry to break down the biggest topics happening today in BioHealth.

**Rich Bendis:** Hi, this is Rich Bendis, your host for *BioTalk*, a regular podcast we do with leaders in the BioHealth industry, in the BioHealth Capital Region, nationally, or internationally. And we have a frequent visitor to *BioTalk* and to the BioHealth Capital Region who is beginning to learn a lot more about what we're doing here based on how he follows the top regions around the United States on a regular basis. So we have Alex Philippidis, senior news editor for *Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology News*, who is joining us for a repeat performance on *BioTalk* today. Alex, welcome again.

**Alex Philippidis:** Hi. Welcome back, Rich, or should I say—

**Rich Bendis:** [laugh]

**Alex Philippidis:** —howdy again! [laugh]

**Rich Bendis:** Yes, you've got your *BioTalk* mug. Thank you!

0:01:00 I had mine earlier, but I finished my tea. So it's afternoon, and I'm drinking just plain old Poland Spring water right now, Alex. And I see—I'm broadcasting from home. I see you're in the *Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology News* headquarters building. But you look like you're alone, Alex.

**Alex Philippidis:** Well, actually, there's another one or two employees over here for now. Over time, that will ramp up. There has not been a formal decision or date set for reopening, but that's expected in the summer, again, so long as the present trends of fewer cases, fewer people sick, continue in our area.

**Rich Bendis:** A lot of people don't know that the headquarters for *GEN* publication and many other publications is in New Rochelle, New York. And New Rochelle, New York became very famous during our COVID-19 pandemic.

0:02:00 Alex, talk a little bit about what you went through, because you were sort of the hot spot for America for a while.

**Alex Philippidis:** The offices of *GEN* and Mary Ann Liebert, Inc.—that’s the parent company—are in New Rochelle, a mile and a half from what was the first containment zone when the first cases of COVID-19 popped up in the New York metro area in New Rochelle. Since then—I should say as of June 15th, which is the latest number of the city of New Rochelle’s website—2,992 cases have been, which is roughly a little under 10% of the total—it’s 34-thou and change, at last count, within Westchester County. And it’s basically—as with most of the country and a lot of the world, it has upended life. And since the 12th of March, we at *GEN* and Liebert have been working from home, with exceptions here and there. Remember, our area, Westchester, is now in phase three of the planned four-phase recovery, as of today.

0:03:05 So in phase three, you have some indoor dining with reduced capacity as well as the outdoor dining, as well as takeouts and deliveries for the restaurants. I’d say that’s the biggest change, although you also have, in phase three, spas and tattoo places and gyms now can resume operation.

**Rich Bendis:** Yeah, it sounds like the spas and the tanning salons are things that you and I go to on a weekly basis.

**Alex Philippidis:** [laugh] Well—

**Rich Bendis:** But there are some people that need that, and—

**Alex Philippidis:** Well, some people want it, too.

**Rich Bendis:** And they want it.

**Alex Philippidis:** To each their own.

**Rich Bendis:** Good for them. To each their own. So at the end of the day, though, I got to know you because you put together an annual ranking of the top biopharma clusters in the United States and have been doing this for how many years now, Alex?

**Alex Philippidis:** Stretching back to 2014, with the cluster. It’s an annual ranking. We look at five criteria—NIH funding, patents.

0:04:02 We look at the amount of lab space. We look at venture capital funding. And we look at numbers of jobs. And from those, attempt to—basically the numbers tell the story. The interesting thing is that the same ten

regions have been in the ranking stretching back to 2014, although the order for many of them has been different. The first time we did this, San Francisco Bay area was tops in the nation, although for the last roughly five years, it has been Massachusetts, like Boston and Cambridge, primarily. And within, we've seen New York City and the BioHealth Capital Region advance in that time. You've seen other regions sort of step back and start to bounce back. Seattle comes to mind when I say that, because they lost that regional anchor in Amgen, but they've come back and nurtured some homegrown companies like Juno Therapeutics which got bought up by Celgene, which got bought up by Bristol Myers-Squibb. [laugh]

0:05:00 That's the story of biotech. And more recently, Silverback Therapeutics with 87 million-plus in financing recently raised, and Adaptive Bio scoring a collaboration with Microsoft. Again, homegrown companies coming together.

**Rich Bendis:** Yeah. So it's not one indicator that really shifts the clusters from one ranking to another. It's a combination of factors. And I think we're pleased to say that probably over the last six years, we've gone from number six, and up to number four. And the other thing is, thanks to you, you also recognized that we branded ourselves differently, and making it the BioHealth Capital Region rather than the old 270 Corridor, which was sort of a five-mile stretch located in Maryland where a lot of the biotech companies are. But really we've become more of a regional cluster than just a five-mile cluster, as it was originally depicted.

**Alex Philippidis:** That area was thought of entirely, and still thought of a lot, as being Montgomery County, Maryland.

0:06:00 And there's, again, Gaithersburg. I believe Germantown in the county as well.

**Rich Bendis:** Rockville, Germantown.

**Alex Philippidis:** So there has been a concentration of biotech not only academic but especially companies there, and companies that were homegrown and became national. I think of HGS, for example—Human Genome. I think of MedImmune, which got bought up by AstraZeneca. I look at those. And you see that today in the region.

**Rich Bendis:** So the changes are still occurring, and one of the things that we feel very **\*AUDIO DROP\*** is that the venture capital financings are growing in size as well as M&A activity, which generally what happens when a big large bio or pharma company buys in a smaller one is they generally try to move everybody out of the area and consolidate into the region where they're located. But what we're finding here is because of the talent and the clustering effect of what's happening in our region, we're not seeing a lot of the acquisitions and our companies disappearing.

0:07:01                      Actually, in effect, they're growing. And other companies like Kite and Autolus are coming into our region, which is also an encouraging sign.

**Alex Philippidis:** Yeah, for Autolus especially, because they're based out of England. And also the fact that AstraZeneca stayed and grew in the area, Gaithersburg.

**Rich Bendis:** Definitely. One of the things that's very nice that you've done is you've been able to visit our region and speak at our annual BioHealth Forum. Unfortunately, because of COVID, we weren't able to do that this year. We're going to make it virtual in October. You might be able to make a reappearance. So, you've got your badge with you, Alex, right? [laugh]

**Alex Philippidis:** [laugh]

**Rich Bendis:** As a presenter. He's got his presenter badge from the Fifth Annual BioHealth—no, the Fourth—the Fifth Annual BioHealth Capital—

**Alex Philippidis:** Oh, yeah.

**Rich Bendis:** Yeah, the sixth is going to be virtual on October 19th. We're combining it with the investor conference we do with J.P. Morgan and Wilson Sonsini, which will be October 20th and 21st. Because it really will have been a year and a half rather than a year, it might be good for you to do a little **\*AUDIO DROP\*** for us this year, if you're willing.

0:08:06

**Alex Philippidis:** I accept your invitation.

**Rich Bendis:** Thank you very much!

**Alex Philippidis:** Thank you.

**Rich Bendis:** Yeah, great.

**Alex Philippidis:** I don't even have to travel this time.

**Rich Bendis:** *\*AUDIO DROP\** people like your national perspective, because *\*AUDIO DROP\** in the top ten emerging markets and the growth that's occurring there.

**Alex Philippidis:** Well, we came close—in the current issue of print *GEN* magazine—*GEN* has a print magazine as well as a website with all these news and feature and perspective articles—we have an article, which I wrote, called “In Praise of Lesser-Sung Life Science Clusters.” And what that is, it's not a ranking like the lists that you've seen through the years for the clusters. It's an opportunity to highlight both basically clusters that are not Boston-Cambridge or San Francisco Bay area. And so we looked at a mix of clusters we have featured in the past, like BioHealth Capital Region, like San Diego, like Seattle, as well as some up-and-comers, regions we've never really written about in the past.

0:09:03 Like Houston, for example, the home of MD Anderson and Baylor College of Medicine, some world-class institutions. We did include Minnesota, or they call it Medical Alley, because of the presence of the Mayo Clinic and its determination over the last year to look beyond patient care into using data-driven medicine. They've hired a fellow—let me get the name if I can for you, but here we go—John Halamka—and he was hired back in December as president of Mayo Clinic Platform, and that's a strategic initiative of the Mayo Clinic aimed at improving healthcare through clinical data. So Minnesota has a more expansive—it's not strictly biopharma, but they do more with clinical data, as a result. And they have some biopharma *\*AUDIO DROP\**

**Rich Bendis:** Yeah, they have Medtronic up there, too.

**Alex Philippidis:** Sure, medical device.

**Rich Bendis:** Medtronic and medical devices, one of the leaders in the world.

**Alex Philippidis:** That's very strong.

0:10:00 But also we looked at Atlanta, the home of the CDC and the American Cancer Society, and Emory University, as well as metro Denver. We've seen AveXis, for example, move into Longmont, for example. AveXis now part of Novartis. It's a gene therapy developer.

- Rich Bendis:** What are the major trends you're seeing in the biopharma, BioHealth industry in the last year? We're going to get into COVID-19 and the pandemic very specifically and in detail in a second, but other than the pandemic and COVID-19, what other trends have you seen emerging within our industry?
- Alex Philippidis:** One thing I saw was it was strong financing activity. Even if last year may not have technically been a record, there were a lot of strong and big money financings, especially in earlier rounds. So you have investors now, once they're sold on a technology, wanting to get in on it earlier. That's one thing. Also, seeing regions looking at varieties of technology.
- 0:11:05 They want to have their hands not only on traditional drug and vaccine development, but more cell and gene therapy, more even clinical research institutions, because they're going to need hospitals and places like that to do trials for new treatments. So you're seeing—and Minnesota is the example I kind of harped on, but there are regions that are looking more broadly in defining life sciences. I mean, I know 13 years ago, when I was writing on life science economic development for GenomeWeb, we looked at LifeSci as not only biopharma but medical device. So for example when we covered Minnesota, it would be medical device. And again, that's not a specialty or focus necessarily of GWeb, but it was for LifeSci purposes. But now you're looking at more expansive type of activity, and that in turn—it does address one of the long-standing challenges of the drug and vaccine developers, which is getting their stuff tested to make sure it's safe and effective.
- 0:12:10 Also looking at more of a focus on cohesion in regions that have advanced in the last five or six years. When I say cohesion, not only your basic academic industry collabs here and there, but also a sense by organizations like BHCR, like NYC Builds Bio+ in New York City—and I'm doing a Zoomcast—I'll be among the speakers there on Monday, that they're presenting, along with leaders from the San Diego and Seattle communities. Joe Panetta, for example. Leslie Alexander in Seattle. One thing those two regions have, and I'll add this as an insight, is that they have leadership with experience. These are folks who know how to build communities where they can bring stakeholders together, not only the companies and the academics, but if necessary people in economic development agencies and government.

- 0:13:06                    Certainly the financing folks, too, because they're so needed for these companies.
- Rich Bendis:**            When you do your thing with New York next week, you gotta tell them the BioHealth Capital Region is coming after them. Because they're number three, and our goal is to be a top three by 2023. So just tell them to watch out, Alex, when you're on your podcast with them, OK? [laugh]
- Alex Philippidis:**       Well, all right, but they've shown some progress in the last few years, too. And it's not—again, I think a lot of it is because New York City woke up starting in the last 15 years under Mayor Michael Bloomberg, with Bill de Blasio continuing some more of those policies to get industry growing. And also Andrew Cuomo, governor of New York. And in New Jersey, now Phil Murphy, continuing. He won some recognition from BIO last year as a governor of the year. And in regions as big as New York and New Jersey, cohesion is a major challenge.
- Rich Bendis:**            One of the common elements between New York, New Jersey, and BioHealth Capital Region and Maryland is, Alexandria Real Estate Equities with Joel Marcus and the leadership he has shown, because of the campus he's developing down there on the East River and actually doubling in size.
- 0:14:13                    And also what comes with that is of course they're one of the most active life science venture capital investors in addition to being a real estate developer. So we notice that he is helping both of our regions grow based on a commitment they're making financially as well as commercially.
- Alex Philippidis:**       And he was an early believer in New York City, with what was now the Alexandria Center for Life Sciences in New York, and has grown in the BioHealth Capital Region and a whole bunch of other regions. **\*AUDIO DROP\***
- Rich Bendis:**            Seattle, San Francisco, San Diego, Boston, Research Triangle. They're in the top seven markets. So, glad to have them as a partner. As a matter of fact, they're going to be the lead investor in our BioHealth Capital Fund that we're forming, a \$50 million fund. But that's enough about us. I could talk about us forever. I want to talk a little bit about—you guys **\*AUDIO DROP\*** what has been going on with the COVID-19, with the pandemic, all the people who have been active in that, and the trends that are occurring.

0:15:08 So give me your perception of what has happened and transformed in the last 90 days based on the COVID-19 pandemic that we're all **\*AUDIO DROP\*** here in the United States and around the world.

**Alex Philippidis:** Well, there has been a lot of back and forth about how fast—if it was fast at all, maybe not as much—governments have acted. The industry has taken a different tack. Stretching back to March, you've had really a scramble—more than—well, by my count, about 250-plus either companies, partnerships, looking to develop treatments for COVID-19. And the pace of that activity has been incredibly quick. Things that took traditionally several years have been done in a matter of months. When I say that, I mean going from early lab tests into in vitro into getting into the clinic.

0:16:00 You've had vaccines—at last count, which was in the middle of the month, ten vaccines had reached clinical trials. Again, some names becoming very familiar to even folks who don't read the trade news like *GEN*. You think of Moderna with the mRNA-1273. You think of, oh man, Gilead Sciences with Remdesivir. Then most recently this morning, Sanofi expanding its two-year-old collaboration with Translate Bio for mRNA vaccines. They're going from five to seven targets. They're formally now including the COVID-19 vaccine in that expanded partnership. And that has gone from 800 million to potentially 2.3 billion-with-a-b dollars-plus for Translate Bio. Again, Lexington, Mass. But actually, I had spoken with the CEO, Ron Renaud, back in May, and he offered kind of a progress update, and we included some notes from that talk in today's writeup in *GEN*. But that's an example of how quickly they're looking at actually starting clinical trials by the end of this year.

0:17:05 And as early as this fall, we're going to be seeing phase three trials with some of the others. AstraZeneca, which glommed onto the University of Oxford vaccine, a good example of one of the real fast movers among the vaccine candidates.

**Rich Bendis:** Yeah, and we're happy about that, because that really hasn't been their strength, but they realized at some point they could really make a difference. Since we have AZ in our backyard with 5,000 people, **\*AUDIO DROP\*** partner with a number of different people. It's just like the other biopharma companies realizing they need to look at people that have **\*AUDIO DROP\*** testing clinical trial capabilities. That finding partnership



is the way to accelerate the development of these vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics.

**Alex Philippidis:** One company in the BioHealth Capital Region I should point out is Emergent BioSolutions, because they are involved in several of the vaccine *\*AUDIO DROP\**

**Rich Bendis:** Partnerships.

**Alex Philippidis:** Yeah, a lot of partnerships.

0:18:00 I think AstraZeneca is one of them, and they've been involved in a few—

**Rich Bendis:** Novavax is another one which has been hot.

**Alex Philippidis:** Yeah, Novavax in the region. They launched their clinical trial for the vaccine in Australia. You talk about the global nature of this work. Unfortunately [sp] the centers that have been the real hotbeds of cases—China and now the U.S.—have been the hotbeds of drug and vaccine actually in COVID-19. So if there's one good thing to say to have come out of that. But the activity is global in scope. You've seen the European Union build and then expand a fund toward COVID-19 research. You've seen activity in Australia with Novavax's trials, with CSL Behring and its interest in convalescent plasma as a potential treatment. We'll have to wait and see how that goes.

**Rich Bendis:** Yeah, I think also one of the things—sometimes we can be critical of government based on whether they were slow or fast to respond. But if you look at the amount of government funding that is going to accelerate the development of these vaccines and the therapeutics right now, it is amazing. Because when you say “B,” there's a number of billion-dollar investments that have been made by government—in BARDA, or, as you say, the European Union—going into these companies, and to place many bets.

0:19:14 And this is the way a venture capitalist would do it. You can't just bet in one company. Generally, you're going to place bets on three or four companies. You mentioned there's nine or ten companies right now that are all sort of in a horse race. And then I just saw an article in the *Washington Post* last week, and their article was, “We don't care who wins. Everybody needs to work together. We just need to have multiple

wins, so that we can get multiple vaccines into the marketplace, and get more people vaccinated more quickly.”

**Alex Philippidis:** The industry has acknowledged—I think many of the leaders as well as even among regulators—Anthony Fauci of NIAID, for example—have said there’s going to be several candidates emerging. Of course, the challenge for them will be squaring away how much they’re going to charge and how to distribute the vaccine.

0:20:03 That’s why you’ve seen a lot of activity toward manufacturing ramp-up. You mentioned BARDA, for example. AstraZeneca is getting a-billion-two from BARDA alone. And there are several—

**Rich Bendis:** With their Oxford partnership. Yeah.

**Alex Philippidis:** Right. And BARDA announced it’s in the hundreds of millions of dollars, with several other *\*AUDIO DROP\**

**Rich Bendis:** I think Emergent had six to 800 million from BARDA that they were getting.

**Alex Philippidis:** Yes. I forget—I can check the exact amount, but it was 600 and change.

**Rich Bendis:** Yeah, 600 and change. That’s real numbers.

**Alex Philippidis:** For sure. And what’s the phrase they use in the industry? Multiple shots on goal.

**Rich Bendis:** Multiple shots on goal. And I guess that’s what we’re doing right now. *\*AUDIO DROP\** and you have followed these trends in the pharma and the life science industry for years—sometimes people look negatively based on the way people are charging for drug prices, and the pharmaceutical industry had somewhat of a negative connotation or perception. But if you look at right now how it can be also a savior for reducing the number of deaths and the indications for the number of new cases that would emerge, sometimes the other side of the pharma industry comes out as well, where it can be the good guy.

0:21:14

**Alex Philippidis:** It will remain to be seen ultimately how much gets charged for these drugs and vaccines, and how that’s going to be paid for. How much are payers going to be willing to stomach, for example? How much will the

companies be willing to just offer some sort of lower cost? And there has been some discussion, for example, with Remdesivir. Should that be 4,000, of course? 5,000? 10,000? Depending on the estimates is where the analysts have come up with their projections for how much in billions a drug like that could make. I think that remains to be seen, but it's a potential challenge. It's certainly not the speed of R&D development from the companies. And you could argue it's not the activity of regulators, because regulators have been more than willing to give quick—or quicker than standard—approvals, given the urgency of the need to find drugs and vaccines for COVID-19.

0:22:11

**Rich Bendis:** That's one of the things that has impressed me, because the FDA generally has had a bad rap, because of how slow it is to get things into the marketplace. But I think their accelerated regulatory approvals at different phases right now goes to speak what could be done in the future when we're done with this pandemic. I don't know if we'll ever be done. But at the end of the day, some of these approval processes we're going through for COVID-19 may be able to be applied to different therapeutic areas or diagnostic areas or medical device areas in the future. And hopefully they can streamline the regulatory process.

**Alex Philippidis:** I think it will, but I think it's going to depend by indication, in terms of how quickly the agency is going to go. And also, we'll have to see that there hasn't been some misstep as a result of the speedy type of review and approval. That still remains to be seen.

0:23:04

**Rich Bendis:** We've been talking about the big companies, but you mentioned 50 companies that you guys are tracking that are involved, whether it be a diagnostic, a vaccine, a therapeutic, whatever, a biomarker or a **\*AUDIO DROP\*** or something related to COVID-19. Do you see any potential early stars emerging that you're anxious to follow in the future that may not have been visible but became visible because of this pandemic?

**Alex Philippidis:** No, but I think there could be. I think in three to six months, I would expect that—and again, we have a four-step rating, if you will, or ranking. We have front-runners, which are some of the obvious names you've seen, like Gilead with Remdesivir, like Moderna with its vaccine.

Regeneron's antibody cocktail comes to mind. Then we have three lower steps—definitely maybe. Sort of the next step up. Eli Lilly's candidates fall into that. They have collaboration with AbCellera which we've written about at *GEN* for antibodies.

0:24:04

And ultimately Lilly is looking at an antibody cocktail of its own. Lilly has a separate collaboration with Junshi Biosciences for another antibody that could be part of that cocktail. And, having Junshi gets them entryway into China, which companies do have to think globally as they go about with their development for COVID-19. Then we have keeping-an-eye-on type candidates. So some of those I'm expecting will move up. Then those that are just too soon to tell.

**Rich Bendis:**

So you have four categories. Are those public rankings that you—rankings, but do you have the four categories spread out in the publication?

**Alex Philippidis:**

We have those spread out, yeah. The tracker is sort of a website within a website, because we have individual pages for each candidate that we track. And what those do is basically summarize announcements in progress of these vaccines through clinical development, financial. Sometimes it follows setbacks.

0:25:01

I mean, you think of hydroxychloroquine, for example, which became very public, very controversial, but in the last week—actually, the last eight, nine—well, as of this recording—

**Rich Bendis:**

As of today.

**Alex Philippidis:**

—yeah, ten days, where it has been setback after setback. The drug lost its FDA emergency use authorization. Then there were trials by the NIH National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, by Novartis. That was a phase three trial. And by the World Health Organization. And all three were halted. Novartis, because they couldn't recruit enough patients. The other two because they said, "Well, efficacy was an issue." So there are sometimes setbacks within the candidates. Also companies as well. Kaletra was an early favorite of AbbVie's. But you saw now AbbVie partnership with Harbour BioMed, and again, looking at antibodies. Kind of a different approach. And maybe this time, they'll fare better.

0:26:00

**Rich Bendis:** I think with all of the focus on COVID, people lose sight that there's other elements in the biopharma and the BioHealth world that are continuing on, but there isn't much attention being given to them. So what are some of the other trends you're seeing emerging or other hot research or therapy areas outside of the COVID-19 area that you see are going to be hot areas for the future?

**Alex Philippidis:** I think you're still seeing a lot of activity in cancer. You're seeing a lot—look, actually as an offshoot of COVID—at risk of being—you're seeing renewed interest in infectious disease. For a long time, that was sort of poo-pooed. Despite laws like the GAIN Act in 2012, there hasn't been until lately as much of an emphasis by companies that wanted either rare disease or cancer or other areas that were perceived to be of greater financial *\*AUDIO DROP\** gain for. I also see—again, there's still continued cell and gene therapy development..

0:27:04 There are bunches of studies and R&D efforts that took place before the pandemic. But a lot of them continued. Not all. In many cases, companies did have to pivot. But you're seeing—there was a new gene therapy—I'll have to call it up if I can—I wrote about it last week in *GEN*, and it was—

**Rich Bendis:** You have to call it up, and you wrote about it last week, Alex?

**Alex Philippidis:** [laugh]

**Rich Bendis:** It sounds like you've got my mind here. I can't [sic] forget what I ate for breakfast.

**Alex Philippidis:** [laugh] Well, it'll come. Oh, boy. Here we go. Yes! Pfizer and Sangamo which have had—they're developing a gene therapy for hemophilia. And what happened was last week they reported positive results for a phase 1/2. And that could be—again, this is a one—[laugh]—I'll look it up.

**Rich Bendis:** That's OK.

0:28:01

**Alex Philippidis:** But that was an example of some positive research happening in the meantime that you didn't hear as much about. And certainly we know a lot of the readership focus has been on COVID-19. And to another extent, the more traditional big therapy areas like cancer, that has always been of interest. I don't think that has really died.

**Rich Bendis:** That's not going to change.

**Alex Philippidis:** No. Not at all.

**Rich Bendis:** Let me ask you a question just from a person out in the street. And I'm talking to Alex Philippidis, senior news editor for *Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology News*. So I have an interesting story that I think is very interesting. You've never heard of me. There's two ways for you to get stories. You're going to go out and research something that you want to write about. But do people also contact you? I'm sure you get a lot of press releases and everything else that you might find interesting. How do you select those things which you feel are newsworthy that you're going to write about or will end up in your publication?

0:29:00

**Alex Philippidis:** Folks do send press releases. They also occasionally do contact me through Twitter at @AlexWestchester, or on LinkedIn. I notice I get occasional queries from people that way. There's a lot more news than I or even *GEN* can focus on at a different time. One thing is I have a couple of editors that I'm always in touch with, and I try to gauge for that. Now, for some things where there's a lot of lot of money involved, or if it's something that we've written in the past and we know we're going to follow up—like this Sanofi and Translate Bio collaboration, there, I was able to just jump on that this morning when that announcement came. Yesterday, I was able to jump on the clinical trials and the halted trials for hydroxychloroquine. So certainly things that we've followed, we should follow through, and so we'll do coverage.

0:30:00

If there's something new—again, I remember a company out of Florida called AGTC which is gene therapy ocular, eye disorders. And that's a company that has been of some interest, and I've had occasion—they've made the CEO available. We've spoken and we've done a little bit of occasional writing. Again, with the pandemic, it's really sort of changed a lot of the focus for *GEN*. That, I think, will start to modify a little bit, and I think we'll get back to getting into some of the other disease areas, just as the height of the news coverage abates to a point where there's a level of activity, and then there's other stuff going on, too.

**Rich Bendis:** Other than the remote environments that we work in, I think there has been behavior modification or work modification in the way people work

during the days. And a lot of people have had to change their business model. Have you noticed that *GEN* has had to do anything dramatically different in the way that you cover stories, the way you publish, the way you're interacting with people out in the industry today, that you wouldn't have done maybe six months ago?

0:31:11

**Alex Philippidis:** We were ramping up toward a lot more visits and seeing people face-to-face. When I say ramping up, stretching back four or five years, but it was really starting to take off in the last year or two, where we would attend different conferences, where we would meet up with folks. In my case, attending some of the meetings of stakeholders in the New York area, at least, because well, hey, it's easy to travel. In addition to events like BIO, which would be in a different city every year. This year, BIO was virtual. So so much of the news now is virtual, so you'll see conferences come up, and you could be glued to your Zoom all day if you wanted to. [laugh] That's one big difference from a few months ago.

0:32:00

But in the end, the news is the news. So it's just the tools and the way we'll go about learning things might change because of the pandemic. Actually, they did. But I would expect that to moderate a little bit, so that maybe we'll still see—some virtual events, I think now through the fall, I'm seeing from different groups and organizers. But I hope we can get back to normal next year. I really do.

**Rich Bendis:** I hope so, too. You can't really match having the personal interaction. It's really when you get into the environments, and you're at a meeting, whether it's coffee or having a cocktail or having a meal or something, you'll find out just as much news there as you will as going to be formally the speakers of the content that's happening.

**Alex Philippidis:** Oh, sure. Sure.

**Rich Bendis:** And sometimes some of the stuff that you hear secondhand is just as interesting or more interesting than what you hear that everybody knows about.

**Alex Philippidis:** That was one of the joys of going to whether it was the Forum last year or BIO, which was in Philadelphia last year.

0:33:04 That was a fun few days. Again, a lot of bouncing around to interviews. Because for me, if I go to a conference, what happens is every PR person in town figures out that you're going there. So you try to use your time to line up several interviews. But you also want to get to some panel discussions and presentations that are more plenary in nature that might have some important information there, too.

**Rich Bendis:** Sounds like a real news room in the background, there, Alex.

**Alex Philippidis:** Well, yeah. The *GEN* and Lieber offices are right next to a fire department, fire house. So we do have the trucks, when they're not out on a call, they're testing the system. They're backing them up, they're maintaining them, so when they have to answer the bell, at least the trucks will be ready.

**Rich Bendis:** That's good.

**Alex Philippidis:** So you do hear noise, and [laugh] we get used to it.

**Rich Bendis:** You mentioned BIO. Did you participate in BIO this year?

0:34:01

**Alex Philippidis:** What I did was I listened in on some of the sessions. There was one that was focused on COVID-19 that had about five or six speakers, so I listened to that. I saw the Anthony Fauci fireside chat. So there were selected talks. Which, I mean, would be done any other year as well. That you'd maybe a talk here, a panel discussion there, in addition to a lot of one-on-one opportunities with this CEO or that chief scientific officer or whoever.

**Rich Bendis:** One of the biggest news items was a change in leadership for BIO from Jim Greenwood to Michelle McMurry-Heath. One who was a congressman before Jim and from Pennsylvania, and then Michelle McMurry-Heath coming from Johnson & Johnson, who was working in public policy in D.C. What do you think about that change in leadership with BIO?

**Alex Philippidis:** It was a passing of an era, but it should reinvigorate BIO further, because it will have not only the challenges of continuing the industry ramp-up we've seen with COVID-19, but also they live or don't based on how well they can create relationships with lawmakers, with regulators and the like in Washington.



- 0:35:18 That's why Jim was brought in 15 years ago. He did, by all accounts, a good enough job. So here's a best example of how good a job he did. One of the areas that has seen consistent increases in the last couple years has been the NIH, and that has been both parties buying into the need for additional funding at a time when even if President Trump comes out with a first draft of a budget that might show a cut in funding for the agency, you'll see that in the House and Senate, they quickly restore it and add to it. So that's an example. And it's not just BIO. There are many, many groups for the LifeSci industry that are effective in Washington. We think of pharma and AACR and the like.
- 0:36:03 But it goes to show you the little bit more respect the industry has gained in the last 15 years. And now that respect is going to be watched very closely by the lawmakers to see, gee, will the industry come up with something quickly enough on the COVID-19? Will we see return on investment, so to speak.
- Rich Bendis:** Well I think the key is that there's a lot more focus on the whole industry right now, and everybody's watching. So that can be a positive impact as well as it could have a sideways or a negative impact. But let's hope on the positive side, since both of us look at our glasses being half full, correct?
- Alex Philippidis:** Yeah, I would say.
- Rich Bendis:** So I think we've covered a myriad of topics today, which is very good to give a little overview of what's going on within the industry. Any last words you have for the listeners for *BioTalk* right now?
- Alex Philippidis:** Gee! I would say thank you, first off, for those of you who read and follow *GEN*, for those who keep track of the industry and have an interest and a passion for not only seeing new drugs and treatments, but especially seeing patients get better. Because that sort of keeps all of us working.
- 0:37:08
- Rich Bendis:** I know that you're very available and accessible to people. So Alex Philippidis, the senior editor for *Genetic Engineering News*, if someone wants to write to you directly, would you mind giving them your email address?

**Alex Philippidis:** No, sure. It is APhilippidis—that's A, P as in Peter, H-I-L-I, two Ps as in Peter, I-D as in David, I-S, at GenEngNews.Com. G-E-N-E-N as in Nancy, G-N-E-W-S, dot-com. [APhilippidis@GenEngNews.com](mailto:APhilippidis@GenEngNews.com), on Twitter as AlexWestchester, and on LinkedIn.

**Rich Bendis:** Great. Thank you very much. I've enjoyed catching up with you, again, Alex. Hopefully the next time—I don't know if it's going to happen in October, but we're going to see each other personally one of these days. But again, I'm going to have an invitation sent out to you so that you can give us an update on what's going on in biopharma clusters around the United States for our BioHealth Forum, virtual conference, October 19th, 2020. So thank you for being on *BioTalk*.

0:38:05

**Alex Philippidis:** Thank you, Rich, for having me.

**Narrator:** Thanks for listening to *BioTalk* with Rich Bendis.

**End of recording**