EP.141 - Ruchika Nijhara - MD Stem Cell Research Fund

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. I'm your host for *BioTalk*, and we basically interview very interesting people in the BioHealth Capital Region, nationally, and also global leaders within the BioHealth industry. We have somebody within our own backyard today from the state of Maryland, who's affiliated with TEDCO but runs a very important program in conjunction with TEDCO. We have Dr. Ruchika Nijhara, who's the Executive Director for the Maryland Stem Cell Research Fund with us today to join *BioTalk*. Ruchika, welcome to *BioTalk*.

Ruchika Nijhara: Thank you, Rich. Thank you for inviting me, and I am glad that I'm here with you today.

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Rich Bendis: It's taken us a long time to coordinate the right date for this, but finally, we're here, and it's good timing, because you're going to have some news for the listeners to talk about later, how they can get involved in your program. Before we talk about that, we have to introduce what your program is and introduce you to the listeners. There's no better way than, rather than me to introduce you, than to you to do it for yourself, because you know a lot more about your background than I do. Ruchika, take it away and give our listeners a little background on how you got to where you are today.

Ruchika Nijhara: Rich, yes, this is a very timely meeting or interview or podcast, however, you want to call this. To start with my introduction, I'm Executive Director of Maryland Stem Cell Research Fund, and it's been six exciting months in this role now.

0:01:49 Prior to being here, I served as the Vice President of Georgetown University Office of Technology Commercialization, where I was overseeing all projects of all aspects of technology development and commercialization, including the management and commercialization of intellectual property assets at the university, as well as its commercialization, and forming and working with new companies that

got spinned off from university. I was there for long time, 15 years. Before being at Georgetown, I was part of a team at University of Maryland, Baltimore, working with the Office of Technology Transfer. Again, similar roles, of course, looking at intellectual property protection and management, commercialization, collaborating with academic researchers at Maryland—University of Maryland, Baltimore, specifically—and building and growing the spin-off companies that were affiliated with the university.

0:02:53 In both these roles, I feel privileged that I had the opportunity to work with the brilliant minds and entrepreneurs and investors and companies to promote the commercialization of those early but innovative technologies for a wide range of diseases. So, it wasn't like I was working on a particular disease area; it was anything and everything that was innovative. That was exciting. My academic journey actually started in India, New Delhi, where from the very get go, I had interest in science generally. I started my PhD in biochemistry from the University of Delhi. That's where I did my masters in biochemistry as well. then I came to NIH, NCI particularly, to do my postdoc, and that was in the field of cell biology and immunology. That journey also brought me to Office of Technology Transfer at NIH where I gained really valuable experience in technology transfer. That's the biggest office in the world as it relates to commercialization of innovative technologies.

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Rich Bendis: Were you working with Mark Rohrbaugh there?

Ruchika Nijhara: Yes, he was leading the office at the time with Steve Ferguson in particular.

Rich Bendis: Steve Ferguson too, sure. Yeah.

Ruchika Nijhara: Being in that office, learning the robes, understanding what it takes really helped me to appreciate what it takes to bring those lab discoveries to become a product. That experience definitely helped, and then I did my MBA at the University of Maryland to really solidify and get an academic degree to support my career. Over the years, having being in the field of this technology transfer or commercialization, my expertise became how to have partnership between academia and industry. What is needed to have IP protected? What are the inventions? How do you do technology

development? And how technology development leads to economic development.

0:05:02 These were all some of the expertise and skills I gained over years, and also very importantly, a deep understanding of the challenges that researchers really—or, how to translate their scientific discoveries to become something that's practical and useful to impact people's life.

Rich Bendis: Perfect background to prepare you for what you're doing today, and the listeners can't see you, Dr. Nijhara, but basically with the depth of your background, I can't believe—you look too young to have all of that broad resume that you have behind you.

Ruchika Nijhara: Thank you. I'll take that as a compliment. But yes, it took years. It's over two decades of experience, I would say, in tech-transfer field as we call it, or moving those discoveries from lab to market.

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Rich Bendis: Well, you've had some great mentors working with Steve Ferguson and Mark Rohrbaugh at the office there and then also Jim Hughes and what they were building at the University of Maryland and what that's become today. You've been involved in two extremely successful programs to prepare you for what you're doing today, and then going to Georgetown 15 years. I can't believe you spent 15 years at Georgetown! We're just starting to engage with them now, and unfortunately you've left, but I'm starting to work with Tatiana, who is the new head of tech transfer at Georgetown. I'm sure you built a great foundation for her to take over after you've left.

Ruchika Nijhara: Believe it or not, Rich, yes. Look, having the diverse experience, doing research in two different continents, having to work in a public and US state institution, and of course a private research institution, it just has diversified my experience and really has solidified my experience in terms of how we can make the system more innovative.

0:06:57 Having to work in Maryland where I saw that whole ecosystem being there, and you were just enhancing it, to come into Georgetown, we were just secluded, essentially. When I was leaving, I started working with TEDCO to bring some of the—because most of the startups at Georgetown University were either in Virginia or in Maryland, but there

wasn't that ecosystem, so I started building on those initiatives that would connect us all. And Rich, honestly, you're doing great building this community together, so keep doing what you're doing. It was exciting when I was told about this position at MSCRF; this was a perfect opportunity to go back. While I enjoyed what I did at Georgetown and the challenges that existed there and coming up with ways to solve those challenges, it was just when I saw this opportunity, it was just so hard to say no.

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Rich Bendis: With your background, it's a natural transition to do what you're doing today. Actually you're running your own program too, which is very, very good. You have the experience in building and leading programs, and this is a very important program to the state of Maryland and to TEDCO, so congratulations with your first six months at MSCRF. I know you're going to be able to build this just like you've built the other programs you've been affiliated with.

So, the listeners are dying to hear what the Maryland Stem Cell Research Fund does, and I know after six months you're an expert in it, and nobody knows more about it than you do right now, so let's talk about what you do at the MSCRF.

Ruchika Nijhara: MSCRF is Maryland Stem Cell Research Fund. A lot of people confuse it with foundations. No, it's a fund. It's a state-driven initiative that is dedicated to expediting cutting-edge stem cell research that drives healthcare and has a positive impact on human lives.

0:08:54 The fund is almost now 16 years old. It was in 2006 during Maryland General Assembly session when the Maryland governor and the Maryland General Assembly enacted the Maryland Stem Cell Act of 2006 to help support stem cell research due to the fact that there was very limited funding, especially federal funding, to support that kind of work. And that's how the fund was created, what we call the Maryland Stem Cell Research Fund. The fund had a very clear and visionary permission, which was, again, to fund early stage or any research that's directed to stem cell and regenerative medicine to help those initial discoveries or projects get developed and become products to improve patients' lives.

0:09:54 In fact, I take pride in saying that Maryland was one of the few states that provided—that actually realized the potential of stem cell research and supported through this fund the development of those innovative ideas and all the discoveries, many of which today are in clinical development. Until today, the state, Maryland governor, and legislature have supported this fund. Every year, this fund has gotten appropriation from the state, and it's been 16 years, and that commitment is still there. In fact, if we go back fiscal year to fiscal year—we are right now in fiscal year '24, so I'm talking about last year's fiscal year when the fund actually doubled—more than doubled—to $20.5 million thanks to Governor Moore and his administration that he kept the budget the same for this year, so I have $20.5 million to spend and give awards.

0:11:00 Today, MSCRF has given awards over $200 million with over 600 different technologies from research institutions and businesses. Just in last fiscal year '23, we had allocated $17 million towards funding to 41 different scientists from companies from research institutions. I feel definitely grateful that we have the support of the governor. Any funding that comes through has really shown its impact in one way or the other.

Rich Bendis: Yeah, it's great to see the track record the fund has had, because it's rare that you see growth like this, having gone through probably now three or four different administrations, as well as multiple assemblies on an annual basis, to see the growth grow to where you are today is generally unusual because they generally flatten out, or else priorities change within different administrations.

0:12:02 Programs like this can only be successful when you have continuity and you can build year after year. And that's one of the most important things you said, Ruchika, is that you've had $200 million invested, but it's been a 16-year-old period, and there is predictability and sustainability of the program which has come to that, which makes it easier for you as the leader of the fund to continue to lead it from a year-to-year basis.

Let's talk a little bit about some of the parameters around the fund right now. First of all, who's eligible to apply for the fund? What kind of awards can people get? What's the size of the different awards that people can get? And, can people get multiple awards? If they do good work with maybe the first grant that they might get, can they reapply for additional awards in the program?

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Ruchika Nijhara: I'm glad you're giving me this chance to talk about the program. All the questions you're asking, I'm dying to respond because this is what I want my listeners to hear, so let me start with this. When we started in 2007 we had three programs, and over time we really expanded. Now we have seven programs. We have a broad spectrum of stem cell scientists, from young postdoctoral fellows who are just in the lab getting trained, to faculty who are just new and developing and building their career, to established scientists either in research institutions or in companies; so, a gamut of people we fund.

Different programs have different eligibility criteria. All that information is on our website, but I'll quickly go through it just so that people know where they fit in that bucket. In terms of the technologies we fund, we fund anything and everything that relates to stem cell and regenerative medicine, be it a research tool, be it diagnostic kits, be it just a therapy, or anything that enables research in the stem cell field.

0:14:08 We fund a gamut of diseases, from the most prevalent in Maryland, like diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, and stroke, to neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and rare diseases. There's a gamut of rare disease diagnostics as it relates to our funding. In terms of the program, we fund from very, very early projects to the projects that need de-risking to get into clinical development, or the projects that are in clinical development, or the projects that are ready to be manufactured, or when they are—especially in cell therapy field where manufacturing is such a big challenge, the earlier you start thinking about it and the earlier you start optimizing your processes, the better it is.

0:15:00 So, we fund the whole gamut of these different stages of development. There are seven programs. There is one postdoctoral fellowship program. Most of the funds are for two years, but it depends. Except for the Commercialization grant which is for a year, most of the projects that we fund for are for the period of two years.

The Discovery projects are for very, very, very early stage funding early stage of development where you just have an innovative idea. You don't know whether it's going to work, but the idea seems feasible to you, so we give around close to $350,000 for two years for you to develop and

generate data. We come in so early when even sometimes federal agencies don't want to support that kind of work. That's for academic researchers.

0:15:50 Then we have also a program called Launch, where faculty, new or established, who haven't worked with stem cells, but they want to explore that field because now the direction they have been taking in developing their therapeutics or diagnostics require stem cell work; or they are new to the stem cell field and they want to establish themselves, that program is specifically for them.

Then we have Validation where there is the academic PIs who have IP, and they want to de-risk the technology, and that's where I want to talk about a new initiative we have. Don't let me forget, Rich.

Then there is Commercialization. Commercialization, clinical, and manufacturing: these are the three programs that are available to companies. We definitely want to promote formation of new companies, so some of the programs are catered towards that, but also they want to help establish companies to grow and retain talent in Maryland. So clinical trial funding is for—and that's our only program, that's our only program where the company doesn't have to be a Maryland.

0:17:00 It could be a company outside of Maryland. They can access this funding provided they have a clinical site in Maryland, so that's the hook, but of course we'll only cover for the expenses in the state of Maryland as it relates to that clinical site. But that's a big help. In this field, these clinical trials are really expensive, so whatever help you can get, I'm sure companies would appreciate it. So, that's our clinical.

Manufacturing is where we provide—clinical is $1,000,000 with a requirement for non-state matching fund; Manufacturing is same, but it is worth helping the companies build their manufacturing infrastructure processes. That's one of our newest program that we launched last year, and we got good feedback from companies. We had three awardees from the last cycle, so we'll see how that works, but it was very well received, and it was a much needed program to help our companies in Maryland. And then there is… we've been through all seven.

0:18:01 The range, typically, with the exception of the postdoctoral fellowship, which is $130,000, which I believe is significant as a postdoc—I would

have loved to get that grant—Clinical and Manufacturing is $1,000,000, and the others are close to $200,000 to $400,000.

Rich Bendis: That's okay though, but it's a comprehensive portfolio of programs that almost covers the whole life cycle of research, from very early stage academics who are just exploring, all the way to clinical trials and manufacturing. It's rare that you have the continuity of the programs that can take you through that whole life cycle within a specific research category. I compliment the state of Maryland and the MSCRF for having that vision to do that. A couple more questions related to the programs and the fund. Who makes the decision on who gets funded?

0:19:00 What's the decision making process? And then also, what are the different funding cycles throughout the year when people can apply?

Ruchika Nijhara: You're asking all the right questions that I want my listeners to hear. There are two funding cycles in any fiscal year. We just completed one. There's one in summer and one in winter. The one that's coming up, they will have RFA being rolled out in next couple of days. The submission deadline for that cycle is going to be January 22, 2024, and the next one will be in the summer. In terms of the process, once the applications—we do provide guidance to applicants if they really want to know how they should approach, what really is looked into when the applications are evaluated. All that guidance I'm happy to provide to the applicants before they summit, but once the application is submitted, there are three rounds of evaluation or review.

0:20:00 The review happens by experts who are not Marylanders, so they have no conflict. They go through the—all the projects are looked at for their scientific merit, feasibility, and impact. They score the applications, and then based on the recommendations that's made in the peer review meeting, Maryland Stem Cell Commission makes the final decision to fund the projects, looking into considerations, like what's the impact? What's the scientific merit? And, does it fit and align with the goals that MSCRF has? The process is very transparent; it's very fair. The preference is always to award projects that have strong science and strong commercial feasibility. For the projects that are early in their stages of development, like discoveries, it's too hard to really anticipate what the commercial potential would be, so those projects are evaluated on their scientific merit.

0:21:03 As I said, these projects and these applications don't need to even have data, so that's the idea, is to bring those innovative ideas into a stage where now there is data to support it.

Rich Bendis: You mentioned the commission makes the final decision. I would imagine that's the MSCRF Commission, correct? The Stem Cell Commission?

Ruchika Nijhara: Our commission is an independent commission, and you rightly mentioned, Rich, in the beginning, we are affiliated with TEDCO, but we have our own commission, and TEDCO administers our fund. So, the Commission makes the final determination in terms of which applications get funded, some by date some by each of the institutions, like Hopkins, University of Maryland. So, there's a diversity, we have bioethist We're working in this field where ethics is an important consideration, so very diverse in terms of the commission we have.

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Rich Bendis: And then you're talking about cycles, and you didn't want me to forget to remind you of a new program that's coming out in the next couple weeks with a new initiative. So, why don't we talk about that now, and we'll remind the listeners at the end again about this new program?

Ruchika Nijhara: Absolutely. One of the important things, as I said, my expertise is to foster an innovative ecosystem. Having done that for 15 years and having to see what it is in Maryland, I wanted to enhance that, and the two new initiatives we have are in the spirit of making a deliberate effort to bring industry and academia closer in advancing the field. For the two programs I mentioned, one is Validation. The Validation program is for academic researchers where there is an existing intellectual property, and the next step is to further de-risk so that there is a commercial partner who can do the clinical development and commercialize the IP.

0:23:00 In that validation program, we put up two-tier funding. It is $250,000 if an academic researcher applies for this funding and there is no interest from a commercial partner to take it forward; however, if the tech-transfer office tell us that they have a serious commercial partner who is interested in developing this further, the applicant gets access to an additional $100,000 to work with this commercial partner. If it's a Maryland based company, then the Maryland based company can use that $100,000 to further advance that project. If it's a company outside of

Maryland, the company can allow the academic inventor on that project to further develop the technology, or it could be a Maryland based CRO who is doing an IND enabling studies that is needed as a next step. So, you get access to an additional $100,000 if you have that kind of relationship with a commercial entity.

0:24:04 That's like, okay, find a partner—and it is a way to incentivize tech-transfer offices too, to tell their potential partners—you know, when I was in tech-transfer office, I always used to say, "You as a licensee," or a potential licensee, "why don't you sponsor some research into the inventor lab?" And typically the companies would have to pay that sponsored research from their own pocket. This kind of initiative now incentivizes the companies to allow more research in the inventor labs because most of the time the inventor has all these assets running. They know how to do some of the work, and they're limited by funding most of the time. So, that's one.

The other initiative on the flip side is giving access to additional $100,000 to a company who gets funding through our commercialization program if they find an academic partner in Maryland.

0:25:03 So, from $400,000 they would get actually $500,000 if they have an academic partner to work with on that project. So, that's why I said having to be in tech-transfer office, having to know what the challenges each side faced, this was an attempt to bring these two communities together.

Rich Bendis: Yes, when you bring a new person into a program, sometimes you identify new gaps that need to be addressed, so I would imagine—and we're talking to Dr. Ruchika Nijhara, the head of the Maryland Stem Cell Research Fund—that when you came in, you basically identified there might be some additional programs that could be developed to address these gaps, and that's what these new initiatives are.

Ruchika Nijhara: Correct! More to come.

Rich Bendis: Oh, more to come! Yeah, so by the time we end this podcast, we're going to let people understand how they can learn more about this through your website, and other information you're going to be publishing related to these new initiatives.

0:26:05 But in the meantime, there's been over $200 million invested, 600 different types of technologies and programs. Why don't you talk about a few of what you'd classify as some of the success stories that have come out of this program.

Ruchika Nijhara: Absolutely. It's exciting. But you mentioned—and I didn't touch upon that before—"How many times can you get funded? It is only one time." This is the perfect time to talk about that. Except for our Launch program, which is only for the people who are first timers in stem cell, all other programs would allow you to come and get repeated funding as long as you're moving the project forward. I can't talk about all the programs which, actually, are awardees that started at the discovery stage and now, either they are in the validation stage or clinical stage.

0:26:56 But just to name a few companies in Maryland—Theradaptive, Seraxis—and I think they have come to you, and you had them on your podcast. These companies started at very early stage. There were, for example, one of the companies that we just funded in the first round of fiscal year '24 actually is a university spin-off from University of Maryland. The PI was in the lab, there was intellectual property, so we funded them as a postdoc, then they got into—and this is a company Secretome. So, we funded them as postdoc, then they spin off the company. They got Discovery grants, then they got Validation grants, Commercialization grant, and then they got two Commercialization grants, and they're pretty close to filing their IND next year.

0:27:56 Theradaptive, similar case. Where Secretome works in the field of heart diseases, Theradaptive is using stem-cell based implants for soft tissue loss. Seraxis also got Commercialization grant, and now not only these companies have successfully raised funds based on the funding provided to them, but they also are progressing their science towards closer to becoming a product. Seraxis, they raised up to $50 million. Theradaptive raised close to $30 million recently, and both of these companies will be soon starting their clinical trials in the next year. So, these are some of the examples that, from industry, help form companies, help support these spin offs, and help them grow but also establish companies like RoosterBio, REPROCELL, MaxCyte. These were all our awardees.

0:28:54 Reprocell is actually selling these iPSC cells. RoosterBio is providing the research community these mesenchymal stem cells and exosomes. So,

there's progress in all directions. We just recently funded Phycin, and that's going to be for making tools available to the research community in the stem cell field. From academia, we funded technologies researchers when they had no funding, and now they have gotten repeated funding from NIH and other sources because they were able to generate that data that helped them provide those additional grants. We funded postdocs who actually now have launched their own careers as independent PIs nationally, some in Maryland, some elsewhere. I'm not even going to talk about the publications that came out of them; that's just countless. In spinning companies that are just starting, there's so much to talk about in terms of what we consider as success, but it would not have been possible without the state, and governor, and the legislators to be behind us and give us that chance to provide that consistent funding to our companies and to our academic researchers.

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Rich Bendis: And basically, what you're also talking about is that this doesn't happen overnight. The research that they're doing in stem cells or any other major categories takes a lot of time, sometimes a decade. The nice thing about your program is you've been around, as you say now, 16 years. You have the ability to follow the successes with these companies or researchers, whether it's academic or industry, and if they're continuing to do well, you have the ability to continue to fund them as they continue to progress. So, that's very unusual with a program. And then the other thing that I wanted to talk about a little bit with you, Ruchika, is partners. Having strategic partners that can help support you so that you're not funding these initiatives by yourself, and you have other people who can either provide support with resources, laboratory support, or commercial support. Like TEDCO!

0:31:07 TEDCO has other programs that can also be partnering with you with your stem cell program that have different purposes but are also complementary to the companies you're working with.

Ruchika Nijhara: Absolutely. In fact, most of the time for the businesses we fund, we are actually creating a pipeline for them to invest, and that's what it is: Building that ecosystem. In addition to working with TEDCO, we work with academic institutions, of course. They are one of the stakeholders we cater to, but hospitals, healthcare institutions, because we want to

make sure that those discoveries actually seamlessly transfer into patient care. Of course, biotech companies, government agencies, and departments, there are a lot of resources and federal institutions in Maryland, so we're trying to build that ecosystem.

0:31:57 A lot of spin offs from technologies in federal institutions actually happen in Maryland, so giving them with that kind of support, infrastructure, and resources, again, builds that community, builds that ecosystem. Working with economic development offices and investors, we've been talking—and again, that's sort of my background and my expertise—we're helping for startup companies, those connections, or for our portfolio companies, those connections. We're, because of the connections we have as an organization, building those connections for our portfolio companies where they know whose door to knock and where to go in terms of regulatory guidance. And then also working with similar agencies like Alliance for Regenerative Medicine, or CIRM, which is the equivalent institution in California, and having those partnerships so that we can all work towards bringing those innovative breakthroughs into becoming something that's more practically maintained, useful, has medical products, or is just impacting patients' lives and people's lives, investors, hospitals.

0:33:10 It's just a wide range, and all these partnerships are so important because none of us can live in isolation. We need each other, and if we can create that kind of connectivity among us, it's good for knowledge sharing, it's good for the advancement of the field.

Rich Bendis: You know what's interesting? As we go through this discussion, your enthusiasm and passion for this program comes through. Hopefully the listeners can hear that. With this whole six months you have behind you now, Ruchika, what do you see as your major primary goals for the future for the fund?

Ruchika Nijhara: Six months is a short time. As getting to know the system, understanding the gap, one of the things that's through this initiative that I mentioned, I want to bring that industry-academia collaboration in a more deliberate, intentional manner.

0:34:02 But again, all my goals would be in alignment with what I think is important for advancing the regenerative-medicine field, improving

patient outcomes, and also driving innovation. I do want to focus—and that's coming! The work has started!—in making sure that we have a good representation and good engagement from underrepresented groups, so promoting diversity and inclusion is something that I really want to focus on in the near future. And having to work in two different continents interacting with people from so many different backgrounds, I do believe strongly that having that diverse research community brings new perspective, and it definitely helps in bringing new innovative ideas together, so I want to make proactive attempts to engage with those underrepresented groups and have them engage in this field. So, that's number one.

0:35:00 The other thing that I really want to do is having more of community engagement, public awareness. One of the growing field is tissue engingeering or transplantation, and with that comes a lot of ethical concerns. This is the time when we have those tools, where just recently there was a patient at University of Maryland Hospital, Baltimore, where a patient was implanted a pig heart by using stem cells. Of course, the stem cells were grown in pig and then transplanted into a human, and that patient—knock on the wood—is still surviving. When you're taking an organ developed in pig and now putting it a human, there are all those ethical questions. If we don't have the community that's educated—I mean, of course, there's a risk, but are we taking calculated risk? Are we knowing what the risk? That kind of community engagement, that kind of public awareness is important.

0:36:00 And I want to involve myself in making sure that we do that kind of community engagement, we do that kind of awareness and education to our community, so that we all move together, without slowing us down, in the right direction. And the other thing is, of course, my vision is to have in MSCRF be a global leader in this field, and I want to attract international collaborators and engagement in advancing this field, and bring in the talent and competitive edge to the state of Maryland. And of course, [laughs] always more money! The field this is, it is intensive in terms of its capital need, and some of our programs, like clinical program, clinical trials take a huge amount of capital. As we all know, manufacturing, especially cell-therapy based manufacturing has its own challenges. We are still in that nascent stage. We need to build, we need

to optimize, so I will always been advocating for more money for us from the state.

0:37:07

Rich Bendis: A few small goals will be easy to achieve, Ruchika, for sure. Is there anything that—you've talked a lot about the program and some of the success stories—is there anything you want to tell the listeners that we haven't discussed that you have on your mind right now?

Ruchika Nijhara: I would just say: Look, I'm all for partnership, and I'm all for there to support, so anytime any of my listener who's listening to this podcast, or has any questions regarding how we can help, how MSCRF can help, please reach out. Any help we can provide. If there is a need that you think would be useful where state could provide support, we will be your advocates. At least we'll try to be. So, please don't hesitate to reach out, and stay tuned because our RFAs for all our several programs will be rolling out soon, for which the application submission deadline will be January 22nd. So, we look forward to seeing you all applying, or ask for our help.

0:38:06

Rich Bendis: If they want to reach out to you, how can they reach you? Talk a little bit about your website, and maybe if you'd like, you could share your email address.

Ruchika Nijhara: Yes, we are in the process of revamping our website, but most of the information is there. I would say: Reach out to me via email, or join our LinkedIn, or join me through LinkedIn. We are in the process of revamping all that, but email would be the safe place. R-(as in Robin)-N-I-J-H-A-R-A TEDCO MD dot com. [rnijhara@tedcomd.com]

Rich Bendis: Super! Easy. I want to thank Dr. Ruchika Nijhara, who is the executive director of the Maryland Stem Cell Research Fund, MSCRF, for being on *BioTalk* today. We'd love to do a follow up with you in the future, talk about some of the new programs you've created with your new leadership for the fund, and we wish you the best of luck, Ruchika.

0:39:03

Ruchika Nijhara: Thank you, Rich. I enjoyed my conversation with you, and I appreciate this opportunity that you gave me so that I can tell about my program and what all cool things we are doing to build this community to support this community in Maryland. So, thank you.

Rich Bendis: Thank you.

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

End of recording