

Academia and Industry Collaboration: Finding Common Ground



Recently I attended a panel discussion at MassBio in Cambridge, Massachusetts that discussed the importance of collaboration between Pharma and Academia. It was titled, *Same Coin: Building Fruitful Collaborations between Academia & Pharma*. It was a fascinating discussion even from the perspective of someone that is typically more involved in the marketing of newly launched drugs at conventions. As convention marketing continues to strengthen in importance due to declining access sales reps have to HCPs, we find it particularly valuable at Poretta & Orr to continue to expand our learning about the entire process of drug development, not just marketing. The more we know, the more value we provide to our valued clients. So it was interesting to learn more about just one of the ways drug development can begin.

What came across loud and clear is that there is no “one size fits all” when it comes to academia and industry collaborations. They come in many forms and are continually changing to meet the needs of those involved, and in Massachusetts partnerships continue to increase. All fraught with immense possibilities, as well as challenges. These challenges are certainly not new, however the actions being taken by academia and industry to address them can sometimes help bridge the gap.

So why are these collaborations important? As mentioned prior, they continue to grow in popularity, or some might say necessity. According to *Nature Index Science*, the number of academic-industry collaborations more than doubled from 2012 to 2016, half of those in life sciences. A primary reason for this explosive growth is that most academia labs do not have the needed resources, however, industry can offer the necessary funding, the expertise and the real-life experience in manufacturing products and getting them to market.

It was discussed at length during the panel discussion that forming an academia-industry partnership will not guarantee success. There are many reasons for this such as delays or cultural differences between academia and industry. Transfer offices play an important role in keeping these partnerships on track. Most universities have transfer offices to help file for patents, form start-ups, and collaborate with industry. Often both scientists and researchers from academia and industry have to deal with differences in cultures in addition to the challenges of preparing the academic results to be useful for clinical treatments.

A few cultural differences cited were that academic researchers generally receive some type of grant to work on a project over several years, but industry labs are prone to expect faster results and can actually

disband the work on projects that are not demonstrating some type of promise. Academia also typically wants to shout it from the roof tops when they have results they are ready to publicize, while industry is more apt to want to safeguard this information to ensure another company doesn't profit or benefit from this information.

The good news is that collaborators have devised a variety of strategies to bridge these gaps and differences that help facilitate successful academic-industry partnerships.

Determine Study Outcomes in Advance: Always seek ways to increase the likelihood that your preclinical finding can be easily translated. In advance, outline study outcomes and analyses and the methods that will be used. Be sure that specific details are included by academia so that industry is able to reproduce the results. It should essentially be a roadmap explaining in detail, 'This is HOW we did it'.

Form Collaborative Partnership Early: Don't wait to the last minute or when in the later stages of preclinical research to form collaborations. Do it early so they can build gradually. Collaborations that begin small and then build are said to be more successful. It provides time for trust and respect to be established.

Compromise for the Good of All: As mentioned, academia and industry are coming at this collaboration with different goals in mind. To overcome these differences, especially as it relates to publishing the results, compromise will be the word of the day. Both parties need to understand each other's needs and concerns and outline them in advance, so that a structured agreement is acceptable to everyone.

Communication: Clear and frequent communication will go far and help avoid conflicts. Transparency and demonstrating mutual respect are key ingredients to developing and maintaining trust, which is the foundation all successful relationships should be built on.

After the panel discussion, I came away with the understanding that collaborating with the right partner isn't always easy, because first you have to find one. Then after much work in advance of any research and with a healthy dose of compromise, a successful collaboration may be born. They are not always successful but when they are, the challenges and hurdles faced seem small in comparison to the good that has been achieved.

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