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How MedMates Helps Coalesce RI Life Science Talent

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Dr. John Luo addresses a crowd of MedMates, now Rhode Island Bio, event attendees. Photo Credit: Rhode Island Bio

By Courtney Gabrielson

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Biomedical innovation is one of the five most advanced growth areas of the state's economy, according to the [2016 Brookings Institution study](#) on competitive strategy for Rhode Island.

Hence why [MedMates](#), Rhode Island's first-ever medical technology network [group](#), set up shop in 2011 to harness the state's fast-growing sector and encourage connections between resources and entrepreneurs in the field.

"We are the hub and conveyer of the life sciences community in Rhode Island's ecosystem, to provide training and technical assistance," said MedMates Executive Director Carol Malysz. "It fosters entrepreneurship in the life sciences sector of ... Rhode Island, helping to grow the life sciences in Rhode Island day-to-day."

MedMates was the result of a Rhode Island Foundation event called "Make it Happen For the Community," a program meant to encourage locals to create economy-impacting relationships and ideas. In MedMates case, the program was successful.

"The title came from the 'medical' [element of the work] and the 'mates' was a way to connect individual organizations and companies and universities," Malysz said. "It was a friendly name."

Since its inception six years ago, MedMates has grown into a robust member-based nonprofit. “[We’re] funded by grants, by events, by individuals,” Malysz said. Those participating individuals “can be anyone from a student startup to a more mature professional, or companies that are already started and looking to go to the next level.”

“There’s a lot of support for entrepreneurs in Rhode Island.”

A day's work at MedMate's is all-encompassing. “It’s about technical assistance for entrepreneurs to any kind of process, taking what they’re working on and translating their research,” Malysz said.

Currently, MedMates is led solely by Malysz, with a team of over 20 volunteers and a seven-member board. “We’re looking to grow and expand as an organization,” she said.

That’s not the only goal on the docket. MedMates is interested in exploring what advocacy groups and policies would continue to galvanize the life sciences in Rhode Island, as well as ways to continually engage the community and “convening entrepreneurs,” Malysz said.

One of the ways MedMates has done that is by hosting a Life Sciences Expo in April of this year.

“We had over 30 life-science companies exhibit, with more than 20 sponsors,” Malysz said, with remarks from the Rhode Island Secretary of Commerce Stefan Pryor and Wexford Innovation and Economic Development Senior Vice President Tom Osha. More events like these are scheduled for the end of the month, like its public forum on [October 25](#). “A lot of things we’re working on are coming together and creating more impact,” she added.

The state’s smaller size has made that easier to do, giving Rhode Island a competitive advantage. “Rhode Island is very unique because it is so small,” she said. “With a phone call or an email, [one can] meet a really key resource,” or get quick data from a prototype test.

Additionally, “there’s a lot of support for entrepreneurs in Rhode Island from nonprofit organizations like the Rhode Island Foundation [and] Commerce Rhode Island,” she said. “All of us who are working in this space know each other. There are references, connections, [people] looking for something they’re trying to accomplish — or someone else who has already walked that path. ... It’s that whole sense of building a strong ecosystem in a small community.”

That community is living in an exciting time, she continued. “The Wexford Innovation Center promises to be the start of a transformational time in the Rhode Island economy,” Malysz said. “MedMates is excited to be part of this new era and to foster the collaborative spirit and synergies that will lead to new advancements in science and technology and enhance the quality of life in our state.”

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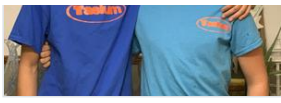


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