



UMB News

Hughes Highlights UMB COVID-19 Research

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During a recent appearance on the Maryland Tech Council's [CapitalM Zoomcast](#) , **James L. Hughes, MBA**, senior vice president and chief enterprise and economic development officer at the [University of Maryland, Baltimore](#) (UMB), shared how University physicians, researchers, and tech transfer professionals are working to bring innovations to life to help clinicians on the front line treat patients and fight COVID-19.



James L. Hughes (right), senior vice president and chief enterprise and economic development officer at UMB, appeared on the CapitalM Zoomcast with Maryland Tech Council CEO Martin Rosedale.

Hosted by Martin Rosendale, CEO of the Maryland Tech Council, the weekly CapitalM Zoomcast is intended to further the regional conversation around capital markets with invited executives from life sciences, technology, government, and service companies in the region.

During the broadcast, titled "A Discussion with Jim Hughes: Advancing UMB-Born Technologies in the Fight Against COVID-19 & Beyond," Hughes, who established two tech transfer collaborations with the University of Maryland, College Park — [UM Ventures](#)  and the [Center for Maryland Advanced Ventures](#)  — highlighted how UMB and the University of Maryland School of Medicine (UMSOM) have a longstanding reputation at the forefront of biomedical research. He noted that with the combined forces of the [Institute of Human Virology](#) , the [Center for Vaccine Development and Global Health \(CVD\)](#), and the [Institute for Genome Sciences \(IGS\)](#), UMB is "ready to hit the ground running and be one

of the leading centers in the country to try to address [COVID-19]."

Rosedale agreed, saying UMB has an "amazing set of resources" that make it a natural leader for epidemiological breakthroughs.

In addition to having two UMSOM faculty members serving on Gov. Larry Hogan's Coronavirus Response Team and dozens of faculty members serving on the front lines treating patients, as well as researchers behind the scenes developing therapeutics, "we have a great deal of expertise that's very pertinent to a pandemic," Hughes said.

Noting it was only the middle of January when scientists began sequencing the coronavirus genome, Rosendale marveled at the breakneck speed at which therapies are being developed and tested around the world and here at UMB.

Hughes credited UMB's progress in part to targeting resources — from researchers to tech transfer contracts — on COVID-19. The University takes great pride, said Hughes, "in being able to get a contract done very quickly. Now we're getting that done in days as opposed to weeks," while still maintaining rigid safety protocols and the highest standards.

That laser focus on COVID-19 resulted in UMSOM being just one of four research institutions in the United States to conduct human trials of the experimental COVID-19 mRNA vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech.

[The University of Maryland Medical Center](#)  also is playing a critical role in the battle against the coronavirus with a 30-day clinical trial of the investigational antiviral drug remdesivir. The research is being conducted through CVD and the Vaccine and Treatment Evaluation Unit. The randomized controlled clinical trial is evaluating the safety and effectiveness of the drug, and it is part of a national study funded by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases of the National Institutes of Health.

IGS, enabled by new funding of \$2.5 million from the state of Maryland, is contributing to the COVID fight by building up capacity to do high-volume rapid testing. The large-scale testing initiative will be progressively ramped up to eventually be able to run as many as 20,000 tests per day within the next few months. This will allow for far wider access to testing in Maryland through coordination with the city of Baltimore and the Maryland Department of Health.

Hughes also discussed the recent acquisition of [UM Ventures](#) -backed Breethe by Abiomed, a leading provider of medical devices that provide circulatory support. Breethe is a startup out of UMB that was founded by **Bartley P. Griffith, MD**, the Thomas E. and Alice Marie Hales Distinguished Professor in Transplant Surgery and director of the cardiac and lung transplant programs at UMSOM. It created the first portable artificial lung system and was one of UM Ventures' first investments.

Hopefully COVID-19 will be behind us by the time the respiratory device gets to market, said Hughes, but it will be around to "address future pandemics and other infections that impact the lungs."

"When we get to the end of this and we look back, we're going to see so many heroes that stepped up and made things happen," Rosendale said. "The University, faculty, and staff are going to be in that group."

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