



## On the Front Lines: UMB Champions of Excellence: UM Pathology Associates Laboratory Services Team

April 07, 2021 | Lou Cortina

Lab added personnel, met each challenge, and worked around the clock to help build up a successful large-scale COVID-19 testing initiative.

The **Champions of Excellence** campaign is a multiyear branding campaign at the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) in which we highlight individuals and teams that exemplify extraordinary accomplishment and represent excellence at the University. In 2020-21, UMB is highlighting the employees who've done exemplary work during the COVID-19 pandemic and are making Baltimore, our region, and in some cases the world a better place.

Today: University of Maryland Pathology Associates Laboratory Services Team, School of Medicine and Faculty Physicians, Inc.



The large-scale COVID-19 testing initiative that launched in Maryland in spring 2020 featured collaboration among several University of Maryland entities, the state, and the city of Baltimore. Right in the thick of it all was University of Maryland Pathology Associates (UMPA).

As the pandemic spread, UMPA joined the state-funded effort to fight the virus by working as the first and third links in a COVID-19 testing chain partnership with the Microbiome Service Laboratory at the University of Maryland School of Medicine's (UMSOM) Institute for Genome Sciences (IGS).

"With laboratory testing, there basically are three phases," said Jeff Parker, director of laboratory services for UMPA, which is operated by UMSOM's Department of Pathology and is part of Faculty Physicians, Inc. (FPI). "There's pre-analytical, analytical, and post-analytical. Our lab does the pre-analytical and post-analytical parts, and the IGS team does the analytical component. We do all the registration, receiving of the samples, and labeling of the samples. We send the samples to IGS for testing, then we report all of the results back to the collection sites."

(Watch video below.)

This undertaking necessitated the hiring of nearly 100 employees by UMPA. The majority of new hires were tasked with accessioning, the process in which samples are received, sorted, labeled, and entered into an electronic medical records system.

Parker said UMPA also hired a logistics manager, project manager, data analyst, and laboratory consultant, and the lab was required to receive Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) certification for COVID-19 testing from the federal government. By fall, the operation's capabilities had improved to the point that the labs could process up to 10,000 samples a day collected from testing sites around the state.

"We planned to have about 30 to 35 individuals working around the clock, seven days a week, 24 hours a day," he said. "Getting the staff on board and getting them trained was our biggest challenge. We also had to develop training manuals, standard operating procedures, and documentation so that the new UMPA-Maryland Genomics lab could become CLIA-certified."

Most employees worked on-site in Baltimore, with many of the operations shifting from UMPA offices on West Redwood Street to UMSOM's Health Sciences Research Facility III on West Baltimore Street.

"It's really amazing how we were able to bring everybody together in such a short period of time," Parker added. "It's such a testament to the University of Maryland Medical System, the School of Medicine, FPI, and all the employees we brought in."

Parker likened the COVID-19 testing initiative to creating a new business. There have been challenges along the way, as there are with any new operation, but the lab has been more than up to each task.

"This is sort of a multimillion-dollar startup company, and the fact that we did it through a joint effort is very rewarding. We are providing a critical community health service, and we continue to do so today," Parker said.

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"We're still tweaking our operation," he added. "At the beginning, we were literally building the plane as we were flying it. We finally finished building it, and now we're just sort of adding a wing here or a wing there. We've become much more efficient."

For these yeoman efforts, the UMPA laboratory services team is being recognized as a University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) Champion of Excellence. Parker called the honor "amazing."

"It was truly a team effort, and I'm very proud to be to be part of that team," he said. "I think each individual who has been part of this operation is very proud of what we've been able to accomplish."

Sanford Stass, MD, professor and chair, Department of Pathology and Department of Medical and Research Technology at UMSOM, is proud of the team, too.

"This was a very challenging project. We had to start this lab literally from scratch," Stass said. "These individuals have worked long and hard in very demanding conditions to provide an important service to the state of Maryland during this pandemic. This recognition from UMB for their excellent performance is well-deserved."

## UMB Champions of Excellence - Pathology



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