Conn. Needs Clinical Care Biotech Model

By GUALBERTO RUÑAO

In Hartford, a city with two major hospitals – each one regularly named among the country’s top 100 hospitals – clinical care is the engine driving advances in the biotech industry. It is a different model than the laboratory-based basic research model of conventional biotechs. In the business of personalized health, it is the clinicians that drive the biotech advances and it can be the driver of opportunity for other high-tech businesses as well.

For comparison, in New Haven, a city that has flourished as the home of Yale University since 1716, the biotech industry is focused on drug discovery, basic research and laboratory technology with a market in pharmaceuticals. Yale is at the epicenter of this research-based market, and its influence has spread across the New Haven region.

Often pitted against one another in their efforts to recruit business and industry, Hartford and New Haven are currently developing complementary biotech industry businesses that could serve to establish Connecticut as one of the leading centers for healthcare in the nation.

For Genomas, our plan is to build the personalized health industry through our headquarters at Hartford Hospital. Similar to other healthcare industries in the city, such as disease management, healthcare services and managed care, we intend to establish national headquarters at Hartford.

Connecticut has striven to ensure that the state remains one of the leading bioscience centers in the country by establishing an Office of Bioscience within the Department of Economic and Community Development, creating Connecticut Innovations to provide additional funding sources for such enterprises, and passing a number of legislative initiatives designed to enhance the business climate for the bioscience industry.

Gualberto Ruñao, M.D., Ph.D., a physician-scientist and entrepreneur, has worked in the Connecticut biotechnology industry for 15 years. He is president and CEO of Genomas, Inc., a Hartford healthcare company developing DNA diagnostics for personalized medicine. He is also director of cardiovascular genetics research at Hartford Hospital. A member of the Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering, Dr. Ruñao is a national leader in the application of genomics to personalize healthcare. He was previously CEO of BIOS Laboratories and Genaissance Pharmaceuticals in New Haven.

Our model is “hub and spokes” with Hartford at the hub, and multiple spokes at leading medical centers. Thus a conventional biotech “head count” approach tells only part of our story for growth. We will be recruiting heavily in biostatics, systems modeling, data management and outcomes research. This plan is different from conventional biotech based on animal models and molecular biology, but is strikingly similar to what is the norm in a typical healthcare company in Hartford.

Thus, here in Connecticut, there are two kinds of biotech. The existing model, based in New Haven, revolves around drug discovery, basic research and laboratory technology with a market in pharmaceuticals. The personalized health model is emerging in Hartford where biotech means customized healthcare delivery and disease prevention with a market in hospitals and healthcare companies. Clearly we are all breaking new ground. And as we grow and develop our complementary business models, we enrich the people of Connecticut with the leading healthcare technologies in the nation.