TALENT TALK EXPLORES REGIONAL BIOMEDICAL REVOLUTION

By Emily Barnwell

The Partnership hosted its first Talent Talk of 2025, the fifth Talent Talk since 2024, on March 13 at WSU Tech.

The event brought together educators, business and nonprofit leaders, and healthcare professionals to explore the region's evolving biomedical landscape.

The Partnership's Ricki Ellison hosted the event, while Partnership President Jeff Fluhr gave the official welcome.

Fluhr emphasized the critical role of the biomedical industry in driving economic growth in the Wichita region, pointing to downtown's emerging healthcare corridor.

Jeff Fluhr, President of the Greater Wichita Partnership

Ricki Ellison, Director of Talent, Workforce Development, and Community Engagement at the Greater Wichita Partnership

The Wichita Biomedical Campus℠ is the southern anchor of the corridor which includes the Kansas College of Osteopathic Medicine, Via Christi and the planned COMCARE and Heartspring facilities.

"The transformation of Wichita's downtown healthcare corridor is not just reshaping our city; it's driving a revolution in healthcare innovation with national and global implications. This is a defining moment for our region," shared Fluhr.

The biomedical campus is expected to bring 3,000 students and 200 faculty and staff downtown and create 1,600 support jobs.

Presentations

Kevin Mills, Ph.D., President and CEO of BioKansas, provided an overview of the biosciences and biomedicine sectors and highlighted their importance to Kansas' economy.

"Kansas is at the forefront of a converging bioeconomy, where agriculture, animal health, manufacturing, healthcare and education intersect to drive innovation. With unparalleled technology, resources and educational institutions, the state is poised to develop groundbreaking discoveries and new health applications," said Mills.

Mills shared that the Wichita Biomedical Campus℠ is a critical piece of this ecosystem, ensuring the region attracts, retains and cultivates top talent.

"Private-sector investment and public partnerships are essential to realizing this vision and creating opportunities for career

growth, innovation and economic transformation," he emphasized.

Gregory Hand, Ph.D., Dean of Wichita State University's College of Health Professions, outlined what the Wichita Biomedical Campus℠ will mean for Wichita.

He described it as a transformational project that will bring together health professions programs from Wichita State University, WSU Tech, KU School of Medicine and KU School of Pharmacy into a single downtown location. Set to open in 2027, the campus is expected to graduate approximately 1,000 healthcare professionals each year.

Dr. Hand emphasized the importance of applied learning, ensuring that students receive hands-on experience through partnerships with local hospitals and clinics.

He also highlighted the long-term vision of making Wichita a nationally recognized healthcare destination, focusing on expanding access to clinical trials, increasing engagement with underserved populations and strengthening interprofessional collaboration among healthcare providers and students.

"By fostering collaboration between institutions, healthcare providers and industry leaders, we are creating an ecosystem that will drive innovation and improve patient outcomes across the region," Dr. Hand shared.

Gregory Hand, Ph.D.
Dean of College of Health Professions
Wichita State University

Tami Bradley, Partnership Senior Strategic Advisor for Talent Roadmap and Workforce Development, the Greater Wichita Partnership

Panelist (from left to right): Gregory Hand, Ph.D., Wichita State University; Sunee Mickle, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas; Marilou Mewborn, Via Christi; and Lynn Loveland, WSU Tech.

Panel Discussion

Tami Bradley, Partnership Senior Strategic Advisor for Talent Roadmap and Workforce Development, moderated the panel discussion incorporating several audience questions. Panelists included:

- Gregory Hand, Ph.D., MPH, MS, Dean, College of Health Professions, Wichita State University

- Lynn Loveland, Dean of Health Sciences, WSU Tech
- Marilou Mewborn, Chief Human Resources Officer, Via Christi
- Sunee Mickle, Vice President of Government and Community Relations, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas

The panelists shared insights on how innovation, workforce development and collaboration are shaping the future of healthcare in south-central Kansas.

Discussions highlighted key industry trends, including advancements in medical technology, strategies to address workforce shortages and opportunities for cross-sector partnership to drive growth in the region's healthcare ecosystem.

Key Takeaways

- **Collaboration is Key:** The success of the Wichita Biomedical Campus℠ will depend on continued partnerships between educators, healthcare providers and industry leaders.
- **Workforce Demand is Growing:** With an aging population and increasing healthcare needs, Wichita must develop a strong pipeline of trained professionals.
- **Innovation and Research are Essential:** The biomedical sector must embrace cutting-edge research, artificial intelligence and technology to remain competitive.
- **Early Exposure Matters:** Introducing students to healthcare careers at a younger age can help build long-term interest and talent in the field.
- **Economic Impact Will Be Significant:** The biomedical campus has the potential to attract new businesses, create jobs and establish Wichita as a leader in the biosciences sector.

Closing

Ellison closed the program with an overview of the Love, Kansas campaign, which aims to attract and retain talent by encouraging Kansans who have moved away to return and build a life in the state. The campaign also encourages families from around the country to consider Kansas as a place to live and work.

A special thank you to the event sponsors Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas and WSU Tech.

The Partnership hosted four Talent Talks in 2024. Talent Talks are the direct result of the team's Talent Workshops in 2023. Each event is guided by the Talent Roadmap and meant to help tighten the feedback loop between industry and education.