

Experienced biotech CEO and investor is Tulane Medicine's first Executive in Residence

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Elaine Hamm, PhD, the CEO of Ascend BioVentures, is now bringing her expertise to the School of Medicine as the executive in residence to elevate the connectivity between Tulane researchers and the corporate and investor communities. (Photo by Cheryl Gerber)

Breakthroughs in medical research need specialized expertise to move from the bench to the marketplace, and that's exactly what Elaine Hamm, PhD, has done throughout her career. Hamm, the CEO of Ascend BioVentures, is now bringing her expertise to the School of Medicine, where she'll serve as an executive in residence

to elevate the connectivity between Tulane researchers and the corporate and investor communities.

“It’s vital to have someone who’s ‘boots on the ground’ and knows about starting and growing companies and interacting with industry partners, someone who knows what’s required to get a drug or device into the hands of patients,” said Hamm. “I can take my experiences and help others learn how to move forward with their work in a meaningful way, whether it’s introducing them to investors, suggesting resources I’ve used, or whatever else I can do to help the Business Development team connect academic work with the corporate realm. That’s my role.”

Hamm, who is not related to Lee Hamm, dean of the School of Medicine, was previously with Accele BioPharma and managed a portfolio of early-stage pharmaceutical companies ranging from diabetes to hearing loss to infectious disease. She has 14 years of professional leadership experience in the commercialization of early-stage pharmaceutical therapeutics and diagnostics with experience in technology transfer, market analysis, and commercialization of preclinical and clinical stage products. She has designed and served as director for several statewide startup accelerator programs.

This spring, Hamm began consulting with Lisa Morici, PhD, and James McLachlan, PhD, [whose adjuvant](#) could make next-generation COVID-19 vaccines more effective.

“Elaine has made a significant impact on our adjuvant development program with remarkable speed. In her short time here, she has already created a ‘brand name’ for one of our leading adjuvants and developed a product portfolio,” Morici said. “She has marketed our product to global vaccine manufacturers including GSK and Sanofi as well as other potential academic collaborators. I am very appreciative and excited to have Elaine as part of our Tulane team. I know that her knowledge and contributions will certainly help advance our adjuvant towards licensure.”

Though Hamm has known the researchers for years, she said, this is the first time she has worked with them and was able to help them prioritize some of their efforts toward filing an investigational application with the Food and Drug Administration.

Since Hamm herself has completed similar applications in previous ventures, she brings the experience to recognize where in the process researchers stand.

“They have a ton of data, and a number of different projects,” Hamm said, adding that managing that amount of data can be overwhelming. “It's just putting together a data package that can help make this really appealing to a pharma partner.”

Hamm also has experience in equity and nonequity funding of early-stage companies and has been directly involved in closing well over \$35 million in equity investment deals. She has focused on the biotech and pharma industries and recently closed a [\\$100 million-plus deal with Boehringer Ingelheim](#).

In addition to her commercialization experience, Hamm has also worked as a senior protein chemist in discovery and pre-clinical development of new chemical entities. She received her PhD in microbiology from the University of Oklahoma and holds several licensed U.S. and international patents.

It's that experience that helps her fully understand a researcher's mission.

“I became a scientist because I wanted to solve big problems. And I just realized that one of the ways I can help solve big problems is sort of be this conduit between science and business,” said Hamm, who keeps pictures of patients taped above her computer. “The final step in the process is hearing from patients that you help them, and that's the goal for me. I get emails and phone calls two or three times a week: ‘My daughter just lost her hearing because she got meningitis; do you have a drug that can help her?’ They're just heartbreaking. But they're also the thing that keeps you going, too. The ink is dry ... but the deal isn't done yet.”

Faith Dawson provided additional reporting for this story.