



THE BIOPHARMA WORKPLACE AND **CORONAVIRUS** —INSIGHT REPORT—



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Introduction

A vaccine for COVID-19 is unlikely to be ready in 2020, according to biopharma professionals responding to the BioSpace Workplace Survey: The Impact of COVID-19 – Spring 2020. Only 25% of respondents thought a vaccine might be possible this year.

“Vaccines are not the kind of things that ought to be rushed through safety protocols,” Talli Somekh, CEO and co-founder of Erisyon, told BioSpace. “They are incredibly powerful tools for preventing the spread of illnesses like COVID-19, but it would be wildly irresponsible to deploy a sub-optimal solution that would, at best, give people a false sense of security and, at worst, cause unintended damage. Therefore, it is not likely that we will have a vaccine available by this year.”

Typically, vaccines for new pathogens take years to develop so, while a vaccine for COVID-19 may be developed faster than normal, to expect it this year would be quite optimistic.

“Given this crisis, companies engaged in developing therapies are working around the clock and the FDA is being very collaborative and responsible to accelerate approvals of vaccines and other innovations...for this pandemic. My prediction is that we will see a vaccine in 2021, but I hope it will be sooner,” Mir Imran, CEO and chairman of Rani Therapeutics, a medical device developer, told BioSpace.



Aside from COVID-19 products, productivity within biopharma companies is slowing. That's partially because so many – 64% – are working from home full-time. Others – 11% – are working reduced hours, while 21% have been laid off or furloughed.

RESPONDENTS WERE ASKED...

“Has your current job status been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?”



69%

No, my job has not been impacted



15%

Yes, I've been laid off



11%

Yes, my hours have been reduced



6%

Yes, I've been furloughed

RESPONDENTS WHO ARE STILL WORKING WERE ASKED...

“Are you currently working from home?”



64%

Yes, full-time



15%

Yes, part-time



20%

No

Remote Work Enthusiasm

The biggest surprise was the change in how people felt about working from home. Before the pandemic, 51% thought it was great. Now, with a mandatory at-home experience, only 39% remained enthusiastic.

That has created some challenges that weren't present before the pandemic began. Those working from home said their biggest challenges were maintaining productivity and dealing with family responsibilities. Those still working in the lab (20%) or office cited communications issues and response times as the greatest challenge when working with their at-home colleagues. Both groups reported feeling disconnected.

To deal with this new reality, "We are having to change how we work so that our idea exchanges can happen remotely," Imran said. "We have been doing a lot of video calls. It has worked quite well internally to discuss projects and make sure the team is staying on track."

At Erisyon, a proteomics instrument developer, "It's taken a bit of time for the bench scientists to reorient themselves, not just towards what they can do away when isolated from the lab but, even more so, the lack of interaction with other members of the lab. They've felt the effects of social isolation more acutely than others," Somekh said.



To reduce the sense of isolation, Lauren Shields, Ph.D., head of customer success, east at Benchling, a cloud-based R&D platform, added, “We’ve seen scientists use virtual tools like Slack and Zoom, and incorporate regular team meetings or virtual social activities to keep employees connected with each other.”

In terms of how the pandemic is affecting the organization, roughly equal numbers of employers and employees anticipate productivity slowdowns and clinical delays, but expectations diverged from there.

The biggest divergences were around potential cost-cutting and layoffs. In both cases, employees were dramatically less optimistic than their employers. For example, 43% of employees, versus 24% of employers, expected dramatic cost-cutting in the future. That’s a 19-percentage point spread. In terms of potential layoffs, the disconnect was slightly greater, at 23 percentage points.

RESPONDENTS WERE ASKED...

“What are some of the challenges you experience working from home and dealing with associates working from home?”



Working from home

Working with associates working from home



49% | 30%
Effective productivity



43% | 46%
Lack of collaboration/
feeling disconnected



41% | 25%
Technology issues



37% | 18%
Family responsibilities



33% | 46%
Communication issues



23% | 50%
Response times/ getting
answers when needed



17% | 18%
Other

RESPONDENTS WERE ASKED...

“What impacts do you anticipate to encounter in your organization?”

Employees | Employers



66% | 70%
Overall slowdown
of work



51% | 61%
Priorities being shifted
(i.e. product research)



44% | 53%
Missed deadlines



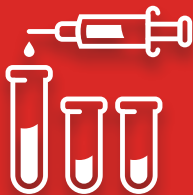
43% | 24%
Dramatic cost cutting



36% | 35%
Clinical delays



33% | 10%
Layoffs



22% | 18%
Changes due to
regulatory guidance



12% | 6%
Other

Company Crisis Optimism

The survey's professionals were optimistic about their own company's ability to survive the pandemic, though. Optimists constituted 66% of the responses, while only 18% were negative or very negative.

By mid-March, nearly one-third of employers had put employee recruitment on hold. That figure will most likely change moving forward. To remain competitive, employers perhaps should consider continuing seeking the talent they will need once the immediate crisis ends. That talent is out there, and job seekers are still searching.

RESPONDENTS WERE ASKED...

"How do you feel about your current company's ability to survive this crisis?"



30%
Very positive



36%
Positive



17%
Neutral



13%
Negative



5%
Very negative

RESPONDENTS WERE ASKED...

**“Has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted
your job search activity?”**



44%

No impacts, I'm
still not looking for
a new job



16%

Yes, I've escalated my
job search activities



14%

Yes, I've slowed down
my job search activities



12%

No impacts, I've
continued to search
for a new job



8%

Yes, I've stopped
my job search



6%

Yes, I've started
my job search

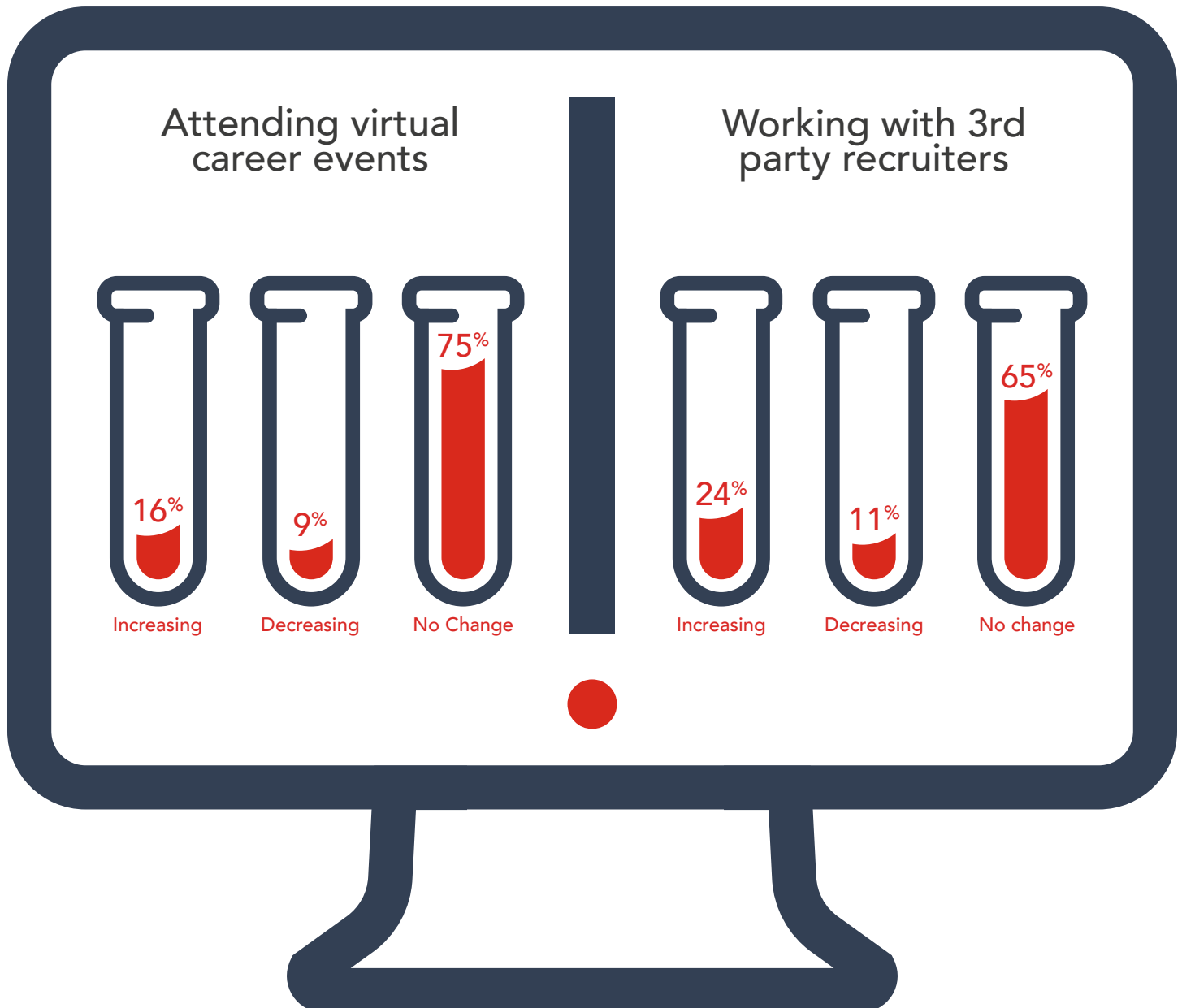
Of the professionals responding to this question, only 44% reported not looking for a new position. Some – 16% – have even escalated their search, while only 14% slowed their efforts. Since the pandemic began, 6% of employees surveyed said they began looking for a new job.

While most job seekers aren't changing their search methods, they report upticks in the areas of attending virtual career fairs and working with third party recruiters.

These potential hires are more than comfortable working from home, and are generally at ease with virtual interviewing and virtual onboarding. When ranking their comfort levels for those activities on a scale of 1 (extremely uncomfortable) to 5 (extremely comfortable), professionals ranked virtual onboarding lowest, at 3.5. Remote working was the highest, ranked at nearly 4.

RESPONDENTS WERE ASKED...

“Please identify some of the actions you are taking in your job search during the coronavirus pandemic”



Pandemic Predictions

Comfort with remote activities will serve employers and employees well in the long run. No one can accurately predict when the pandemic will end, and scientists now are mentioning the potential for a second wave during the next flu season.

RESPONDENTS WERE ASKED...

- (A) "When do you anticipate the coronavirus to subside?"
(B) "When do you anticipate that you will be able to go back into the office/ lab?"



Conditions continue to evolve rapidly, and emerging data tabulating numbers of asymptomatic, unhospitalized persons is changing the risk equation. But, in March, when employers were asked to predict when the crisis was most likely to end, about 20% said the end of April. In a few states, that's beginning to happen.

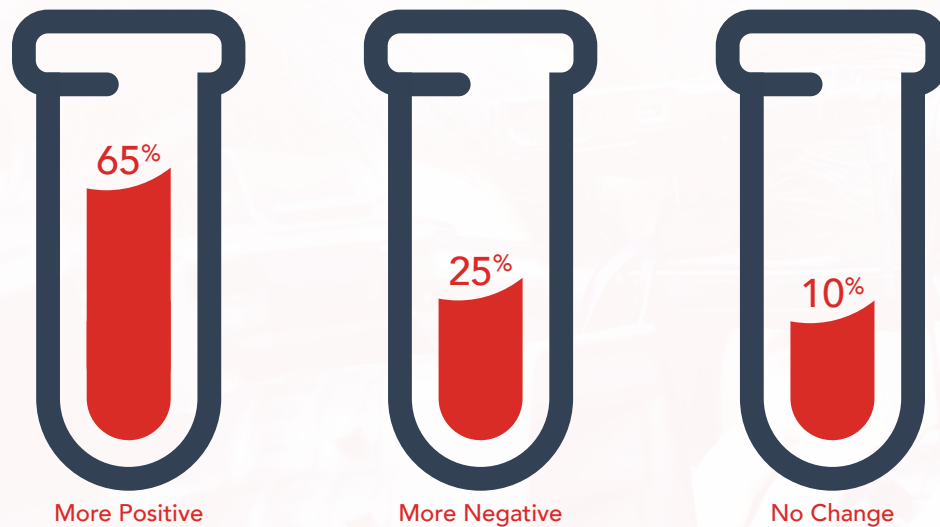
Another 18% predicted the end of May, and yet another 18% guessed the end of June. Similar numbers of employees predicted May or June ends to stay-at-home orders, but a full 20% of employees (versus only 6% of employers) predicted the crisis would extend into 2021.

Public Perceptions

Whenever it ends, most of those surveyed are confident they will return to their offices and labs before the crisis terminates. Some 54% said they expect to return to their place of employment by the end of June.

RESPONDENTS WERE ASKED...

How do you feel the coronavirus pandemic will change the public's perception of the biopharma industry?



The overwhelming majority – 65% – said they expect the public's perception of the biopharma industry to have improved. After all, the industry is working seven days a week to develop and deliver diagnostic kits, and developing potential therapeutics and vaccines in record time, sometimes years ahead of usual timelines.

Fears Spread Beyond Employment Concerns

While the biopharmaceutical industry is working frantically to develop the tests, vaccines and therapeutics to combat COVID-19, the people doing the work are pushing their fears to one side. But, when asked, they admit to concerns. Not surprisingly, they mirror the fears shared by much of the world.

The top fear, shared by 22% of respondents, is that they or their family members will contract the virus and die according to the BioSpace Workplace Survey: Impact of COVID-19 Spring 2020.

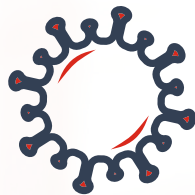
After that, their concerns become economic. At a macro level, biopharma professionals expressed concerns about small business closures and a coming recession, depression, or economic collapse. Those broad fears were expressed by 17% of survey respondents.

The concern isn't strictly economic. "If countries fail to stabilize or regain financial independence, then more people will be killed by this pressure than by the virus," CJ Xia, VP of marketing & Sales at Boster Biological Technology, said. (At the time of publication, Johns Hopkins University's COVID-19 Resource Centre tabulates the global mortality count at approximately 230,000 people – and counting.)

While nearly 70% of respondents in the biotech industry are still working, a Rasmussen poll released April 21 found that 40% of American adults say they or an immediate family member has lost their job because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In late March, the figure was 32%. In fact, more than 26 million unemployment claims have been filed in the past five weeks.



70%
of biopharma employees
are still working



40%
of American adults or
their family member
has lost their job due
to COVID-19



26M
unemployment claims
have been filed in the
past five weeks

Lasting Financial Implications

In the BioSpace survey, 15% of respondents admitted to being concerned about unemployment and layoffs, a lack of available jobs, and, ultimately, a lack of income.

About a week earlier, a Rasmussen poll of 1,000 likely voters reported that 36% of those polled said it was time for the nation to get back to work. At the time, 49% disagreed. Since then, citizens have begun staging back-to-work rallies in several states, including Alabama, Colorado, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, Texas and Washington.

As Mir Imran, chairman and CEO, Rani Therapeutics elaborated, “The economic impact of this pandemic is horrendous, and the unemployment numbers are staggering. Getting people back to work is essential, but that can only happen if there is free and wide-spread testing available.”

“My biggest fear is that, while many of us will get through this, there will be a lasting impact on those who were living paycheck to paycheck,” Imran continued. “This crisis will push them into poverty. For those already living in poverty, it will push them into homelessness. The government will have to step up to take care of our citizens, whether through job programs or prolonged unemployment benefits to support our most vulnerable. The financial implications of COVID-19 will be felt for a long time to come.”



Resurgence Fears

The fourth-most mentioned fear (at 14%) was a resurgence or a spike in infections after restrictions are lifted. Much about the SARS-CoV-2 virus is still being discovered. “Our biggest fear regarding the pandemic is that there will be future waves of outbreaks until universal testing can be completed and a vaccine developed,” Catalina Valencia, CEO of Sapphire Biotech, told BioSpace.

“Also,” she continued, “contracting this virus does not necessarily lead to full recovery in all cases. It may leave a person with a lesser lung capacity permanently – something that is not emphasized in the media.”

Wrong decisions, miscommunication and poor planning by leadership – cited by 9% of BioSpace respondents – could contribute to a resurgence in cases. One of the challenges is lack of clear, comprehensive data that forces leaders to make decisions with the information at hand. As a result, some will be overly cautious. Others will be overly optimistic.



Resurgence Risks

As the patchwork of restrictions within the 50 U.S. states and internationally become increasingly varied, 8% of respondents fear the public will quit listening to health authorities. As new cases, hospitalization rates and mortality figures plateau and then decline, there is a risk that people will no longer take the pandemic seriously. If that happens, social distancing will relax, masks will be worn less frequently, and the virus could re-emerge.

The bottom two concerns were tied at slightly more than 5%: the general loss of life caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, and the lack of widespread testing and available vaccines.

Greg Merrill, CEO and co-founder of Adaptive Phage Therapeutics, thought back to the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic, applying its lessons to the current COVID-19 pandemic. "During the influenza pandemic of 1918-1919, secondary infections were the greatest cause of mortality," he pointed out. "My biggest fear with this pandemic is around secondary infections in patients who previously were infected with COVID-19."

Although we are much better positioned today than a century ago, Merrill said, "We still face a crisis-level number of multi-drug resistant and complicated infections worldwide, as detailed in CDC and WHO reports."



Positive Outlook

Yet, despite these very realistic fears, there is a bright spot. As Lauren Shields Ph.D., head of customer success, east at Benchling, said, "It gives me hope to see COVID-19 bringing the scientific community together for one cause. This is a rare moment in time where scientists can focus on the true goal of science: to help people."

"As a result, we're seeing a different type of science emerge: one that's much more collaborative, much more urgent, and, in a lot of ways, much more united in its goals. I hope we can continue this unity after all this is over because, if scientists banded together to tackle other problems in this way, it could accelerate all sorts of scientific breakthroughs."



1M
average site visits
per month

324K
engaged email
subscribers

110K
social media
followers

2/3
of the U.S. life
sciences workforce
has a relationship
with BioSpace

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