

## Pharmaceutical Industry's Investment in Research, Development Paying Off | Opinion

*The industry's rapid response to the pandemic is the first time that the benefits of ongoing research have become obvious to the average person.*

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About a year ago, it would have been well-nigh impossible to find anyone with something good to say about America's pharmaceutical industry – at least publicly. In fact, a national Gallup poll released last September showed that the pharmaceutical industry had unseated the federal government as the most poorly regarded industry in America.

Yet, a little more than six months later, pharma's reputation rose significantly. In a Harris poll released in April of this year, 40% of Americans reported that their perception of the industry had improved – tracking closely with the technology industry's reputation, of which 41% said their opinion had improved. For pharma's reputation to track closely with that of technology's – America's perennial darling – is a development of historic proportions.



Andrew Vila, the senior development scientist for Cumberland Pharmaceuticals, works in the company lab in Nashville in an undated photo. *Provided By Cumberland Pharmaceuticals*

### COVID-19 vaccine already in human trials

Why the about-face in pharma's reputation? COVID-19. It is now obvious that the only long-term solution to dealing with the pandemic – and allowing us all to get back to living somewhat normal lives – is the development of a vaccine. And the pharmaceutical industry is rising to the occasion in dramatic fashion, with 49 vaccines already in human trials and seven of those in final, Phase 3 trials, during which the drug is given to thousands of people to confirm its safety.

A process that normally takes many years is being compressed to 12 to 18 months – not by skipping any safety measures, but by moving quickly, deliberately and with an agility that is possible when a worldwide industry focuses intently on one goal. It is an endeavor of heroic proportions and, as someone who works with the pharmaceutical industry, I am immensely proud of what is happening.



A Rochester-area resident is given the potential coronavirus vaccine Monday, July 27, at Rochester General Hospital. Four volunteers in Rochester were the first in the country to be given the potential Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine during this late-stage trial. *Provided*

It is particularly gratifying to see America leading the way in development of a COVID-19 vaccine, and the American public predicted this when the pandemic first reached our shores. For example, 58% of the respondents to the April Harris poll said they thought U.S. pharmaceutical companies were more likely to create breakthrough COVID therapies than foreign firms. This confidence expressed at the beginning of the pandemic is being borne out, as American pharma companies like Moderna, Pfizer, Novavax, Gilead and others are among the leaders in the global search for an effective and safe vaccine.

### **Nashville company part of initiatives**

The entire industry is coming together to fight this unprecedented scourge, and Nashville is playing its part. Nashville-based Cumberland Pharmaceuticals – Tennessee’s largest pharmaceutical company – undertook several initiatives early in the pandemic that made a real difference in peoples’ lives, such as making special supply and pricing arrangements to ensure that drugs used to treat complications of the disease were readily available. One of Cumberland’s lead brands, Vibativ, is a potent antibiotic being used to treat life-threatening pneumonia in COVID-19 patients. Cumberland is also developing new medicines to address unmet medical needs.



The first patient enrolled in Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine clinical trial at the University of Maryland School of Medicine in Baltimore receives an injection May 4. *AP*

The rise in pharma's reputation relates, ironically, to the reason it was held in disdain before: money. It is expensive to develop lifesaving drugs, yet the investments that the industry has made in research over the years made it possible to move rapidly now in developing a vaccine. America's pharmaceutical companies are not starting from ground zero, but building on information that would not have been known without billions previously invested in research. The industry's rapid response to the pandemic is the first time that the benefits of ongoing research have become obvious to the average person.

This revelation is probably the most important lesson of the drug industry's response to this horrible pandemic. It is expensive to invest in research and development, and a large proportion of the billions poured into pharmaceutical R&D every year never results in a viable product, which further increases the cost of drugs that do make it to market. Yet it is this long-term investment in drug research that will ultimately save us.