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Calibrant Seeking Corporate Partner as it Looks to Future

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When Calibrant Biosystems began developing its Gemini drug discovery technology around 2003, the company intended to use it to identify drug candidates that could be developed internally.

But the Gemini proteomic drug discovery platform that originally was envisioned for in-house use also is a service that could prove useful to other firms. Calibrant, however, is "not a pure fee-for-service player," Michael Salgaller, chief operating officer of Calibrant, said in a recent interview.

Gaithersburg, Md.-based Calibrant is using its Gemini technology internally to discover cancer-relevant targets for brain, ovarian and breast cancer, and still is in the validation stages, Salgaller said.

The company intends to develop antibody-based therapies against those diseases to move into Phase I testing.

According to the company website, the Gemini drug discovery engine "allows Calibrant researchers to isolate vascular tissues immediately adjacent to the disease site, enabling the analysis of secreted protein biomarkers, which cannot be discovered by traditional blood profiling. In addition to the potential for these markers in personalized medicine, they also provide value throughout the drug development process."

The company currently is seeking potential corporate partners, as it works to further validate drug discovery platforms in others cancers as well as for unmet markets in oncology. Depending on the interest of its partners, the deal could involve drug discovery validation, biomarker identification or the development of diagnostics.

Part of the reason Salgaller was brought on board, he said, was to help the company "take the next step" of finding its first potential corporate partner with a pharmaceutical or biotechnology company. The company already has relationships with academic institutions, in which Calibrant

has the first right of refusal for the discoveries in the area of oncology. Those academic partners include Yale University, the Mayo Clinic, University of Maryland and Johns Hopkins University.

In addition to seeking corporate partners, Calibrant is pursuing relationships with disease foundations, both within and outside the realm of oncology, Salgaller said.

He noted that a number of foundations with an interest in accelerating medical cures to the clinic are steering resources to later stages of drug research, such as translational research and even clinical trials. Some of those disease foundations are willing to consider directly funding research, he said.

Founded in late 2000, Calibrant was spun out a laboratory at the University of Maryland.

To date, Calibrant has generated more than \$10 million in grants from various agencies, Salgaller said. "A lot of companies can exist for decades on federal funding," he noted.

But over the long term, he said, that strategy may have a limited revenue stream and limited investment options. Calibrant, staffed by a team of seven, still is in the seed stage of funding.

But a corporate partner – either within the U.S. or abroad – could expand the company's "bandwidth," Salgaller said.

Calibrant recently added Satya Saxena as vice president of research. He will lead the company's proteomic technology and product development program, and his primary focus will include expanding and validating the Gemini platform technology beyond the initial programs in oncology. He also will oversee the continuing drug development efforts involving lead compounds in ovarian, brain and breast cancer. ■

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