

03 Apr 2024 | Analysis

In Vivo's 2024 Rising Leaders

30 Rising Leaders Across The Life Sciences Sector

by [Lucie Ellis-Taitt](#)

The fifth annual listing of *In Vivo's* Rising Leaders includes entrepreneurs and innovators from across the world who represent the next wave of creativity in health care.

Included for 2024 are investors, CEOs of small and mid-sized companies, rising employees in larger businesses, as well as individuals driving unique health initiatives worldwide.

The 30 people below have been recognized for bringing something new to the game, regardless of how long they have been active in the industry. The list focuses on achievements, talent, creativity and strong leadership qualities.

Look out for other features in the [Rising Leaders](#) series, including exclusive interviews with innovators and disruptors, alongside insights from established industry executives and experts.

In Vivo's 2024 Rising Leaders are listed in alphabetical order.



IN VIVO

CITELINE COMMERCIAL



Lori Lyons-Williams
Abdera
Therapeutics



Trevor Martin
Mammoth Bio



Addie MacGregor
Association of
British
HealthTech
Industries



Lara Mott
ImproveWell



Jack O'Meara
Ochre Bio



Tuyen Ong
Ring
Therapeutics



Laksh Aithani
Co-Founder and CEO
[CHARM Therapeutics](#)

First-time CEO Laksh Aithani co-founded CHARM Therapeutics in 2021. The artificial intelligence (AI)-driven biotech is discovering and developing small molecule medicines against difficult-to-drug targets using DragonFold, a proprietary 3-D, deep learning-enabled platform. Powered by the first high throughput, protein-ligand co-folding algorithm and a world-class team of scientists and engineers, CHARM seeks to deliver innovative approaches to create life-changing therapies for patients.

In June 2022, CHARM raised \$50m through a series A financing co-led by F-Prime Capital and OrbiMed, with General Catalyst, Khosla Ventures, Braavos and Axial also participating.

Prior to co-founding CHARM, Aithani was a core contributor at Exscientia, a leading AI drug discovery company, where he worked on the public company's machine learning platform.

Aithani gained his degree in natural sciences from the University of Cambridge, UK.

**Somer Baburek**

Co-Founder and CEO

Hera Biotech

US-based Hera Biotech, led by Somer Baburek, was formed in 2020 to apply advances in biotechnology to unmet needs in the field of women's health and specifically in reproductive medicine. The company is developing a non-surgical diagnostic test for endometriosis. It raised \$1.9m in seed financing in 2022.

Endometriosis is a debilitatingly painful and infertility-causing disease where tissue that is similar to the inner lining of the uterus grows outside of the uterus. A conservatively estimated 10% of all reproductive-aged women have the disease, which can be treatable but currently requires a surgical procedure under general anesthesia to diagnose.

Hera aims to expand the diagnostic procedures available for endometriosis patients with a process that looks for certain biomarkers in tissue that can be acquired without

surgery. The company expects its endometriosis test to receive FDA clearance by 2026.

Prior to Hera, Baburek was the director of clinical operations at Santalis Pharmaceuticals.



Jeroen Bakker

Partner
Novo Holdings

After completing his PhD in immunology at Amsterdam's Academic Medical Center, Bakker went into venture finance working as an associate at Merck's investment arm, M Ventures, from 2015 to 2018. During this period, he focused on investments across Europe, the US and Israel. For the past five years, however, he has been with Novo Holdings, where he has recently been promoted from principal to partner.

During this time, Bakker has held several board member roles at Novo portfolio companies like Adcendo, Rappta Therapeutics and ISD Immunotec, as well as at BiOrigin, Novo's semi-in-house accelerator.

BiOrigin aims to support the establishment and management of early-stage life science companies, primarily within the Novo Seeds portfolio. Different types of strategic and operational support to companies and projects in order to help them steer through the critical start-up and subsequent growth phase. Bakker is one of three board members helping to push new companies through to critical inflection points. He is passionate about the advancement of human health and well-being through investing in and partnering with cutting-edge biotech ventures.

*Rising Up In Biopharma:
Optimism, AI And Perseverance*
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Sourav Bandyopadhyay

Co-Founder and Chief Technology Officer
Rezo Therapeutics

Sourav Bandyopadhyay was a tenured professor at University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) and associate director of the cancer center when he left those roles to found Rezo Therapeutics. As the first employee at the company and designated chief technology officer, he executed the conception, pitch and building of Rezo – a spin out of the Quantitative Biosciences Institute (QBI) – including a series A financing of \$78m. Rezo, which is using a hybrid computational model, now has a team of 22 people.

The vision for Rezo is to build a platform around interpreting patient genetic variation at the protein level at scale – a novel method with the potential to have a large impact on drug development strategies.

Rezo, with QBI, published initial insights into autism spectrum disorder (ASD) patient genetics on BiorXiv last year, showcasing the power of the platform. This work provides insights into the molecular mechanisms of a subset of individuals with ASD who carry specific genetic mutations, and the map will provide a window into the development of novel therapeutics for those living with the condition.

Bandyopadhyay is a professor of bioengineering and therapeutics sciences at UCSF and co-leader of the molecular oncology program at the UCSF Helen Diller Family Comprehensive Cancer Center. He also serves as associate director of QBI at UCSF; the lab is focused on developing new platforms for the application of personalized medicine and cancer therapies.

**Abraham Ceesay**

CEO

Rapport Therapeutics

Abraham Ceesay brings nearly two decades of biopharmaceutical industry experience to clinical-stage Rapport Therapeutics, which is developing “impactful neuromedicines with fewer side effects.”

In August 2023, Rapport raised \$150m in a series B funding round led by Cormorant Asset Management. Rapport is leveraging discoveries made by its scientific founders to target receptors in specific neuroanatomical regions underlying the pathophysiology of neurological disorders. Its approach, based on identifying and targeting receptor-associated proteins, contrasts with current treatments that act on targets expressed ubiquitously in the nervous system and, in some cases, other areas of the body.

Prior to Rapport, Ceesay was president of Cerevel Therapeutics from May 2021 through February 2023, and was previously CEO of Tiburio Therapeutics, where he built a fully

integrated company that led to the investigational new drug enablement for a rare neuroendocrine tumor.

Ceesay is currently chair of the board for Life Science Cares, on the Board of Directors at Pacira BioSciences, and on the board of trustees at The Museum of Science in Boston. He earned his bachelor's degree from Ithaca College and an MBA from Suffolk University's Sawyer School of Management.



Pavan Cheruvu

President and CEO
Bitterroot Bio

Pavan Cheruvu is president and CEO of Bitterroot Bio, a company focused on the emerging field of cardio-immunology, which investigates the interplay between the immune system and cardiovascular health. Its approach builds on the success of immunotherapies in oncology by harnessing the immune system's natural ability to fight disease.

Bitterroot emerged from stealth mode in June 2023 with \$145m in series A funding. The round was co-led by ARCH Venture Partners and Deerfield Management with participation from GV, Koch Disruptive Technologies and Alexandria Venture Investments, among others.

The company's lead program targeting the CD47/SIRPα pathway is designed to address the underlying dysfunction that contributes to atherosclerosis, a disease characterized by the buildup of plaque in arteries that can lead to heart attacks and stroke.

Prior to joining Bitterroot, Cheruvu was an early member of the executive team at Roivant Sciences and was president and CEO of Sio Gene Therapies.

In Vivo's 2024 Rising Leaders At A Glance



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Danuta Cichocka

Co-Founder and CEO

Resistell

As the co-founder and CEO of Resistell, Danuta Cichocka spends her days ensuring effective strategy deployment, implementation and fundraising.

A microbiologist by training, she completed her PhD at the Helmholtz-Zentrum für Umweltforschung (Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research) in Leipzig in 2008. In 2016, she completed the Executive MBA program at the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne, or EPFL) and obtained a Certificate of Advanced Studies in management of biotech, medtech & pharma ventures.

In 2017, Danuta initiated the collaboration between the EPFL and the Laboratory of Physics of Living Matter (LPMV), which sought to commercialize the two centers' nanoscale motion detection technology and resulted in the establishment of Resistell AG in 2018.

At its core, Resistell hopes to use this technology to phenotype bacterial infections. Doing so will allow clinicians to quickly prescribe the correct drugs – preventing the development of antimicrobial resistance – and also provide avenues with which to test new antimicrobial agents.

**Carl Dambkowski**

Chief Medical Officer
Apogee Therapeutics

Last September, Carl Dambkowski brought his clinical strategy expertise to Apogee as the company's first employee. His contributions have been crucial to the new company's achievement of several major milestones in its first 18 months. Apogee now has over 80 employees and, under Dambkowski's leadership, it has established a strong team with a wide range of expertise, which is projected to nearly double in size by the end of 2024.

Dambkowski also saw Apogee, which was in discovery stages at the time of inception in September 2022, enter the clinic in July 2023 – 10 weeks ahead of schedule. He led the planning of the Phase I, first-in-human study for the company's lead program APG777, with the goal of disclosing clinical data by mid-2024.

Furthermore, his unique trial design will enable both Phase IIa and IIb studies to be run

within one trial at the same time, allowing for faster, more comprehensive results.

Apogee has raised more than \$500m, including a series B financing in November 2022 and IPO in July 2023. CEO Michael Henderson said, “Carl’s drug development and patient-first mentality, coupled with his detail-oriented mindset, were instrumental in the company obtaining this funding to progress our programs.” He added, “Carl represents a new kind of chief medical officer in the biopharma industry—one who is not afraid to take risks and design innovative clinical programs, and who is focused on doing right by patients every step of the way.”

Prior to Apogee, Dambkowski was CMO for two BridgeBio subsidiary companies, QED and Navire.

**Lola Fashoyin-Aje**

Director, Office of Clinical Evaluation, Cell & Gene Therapies
FDA

Lola Fashoyin-Aje, formerly associate director of the Oncology Center of Excellence, has recently become director of the Centers for Biologics Evaluation and Research (CBER) Office of Clinical Evaluation (OCE), a subdivision of the Office of Therapeutic Products (OTP).

Fashoyin-Aje has worked with multi-disciplinary teams and provided oversight of complex development programs, as well as “helped to implement practical approaches when necessary to advance rare disease programs that face unique challenges, such as small patient numbers, limited understanding of the natural history of the disease, or context-dependent uncertainty in the meaningfulness of new and established clinical endpoints,” said OTP director Nicole Verdun when announcing the appointment.

Prior to her current role, Fashoyin-Aje joined the FDA in 2013 as a clinical reviewer in

the CBER Office of Hematology and Oncology Products. She may be best known now for her work on clinical trial diversity issues. Fashoyin-Aje was the program lead for the OCE's Project Equity, which worked to ensure data submitted to the agency for an oncology product reflected the demographics of the patients intended to receive it.



Kristen Fortney

Co-Founder and CEO

BioAge Labs

With nearly a decade of academic work in computational drug discovery, biomarkers of aging and the genetics of exceptional human longevity under her belt, Fortney moved into industry in 2015, co-founding BioAge Labs.

BioAge is a clinical-stage biotech company that discovers and develops drugs to treat metabolic and age-related diseases. The company's discovery platform uses multiomics data to identify molecular mediators of aging and disease.

The Richmond, California-based company recently announced an oversubscribed \$170m series D financing round, which was led by Sofinnova Investments and included Eli Lilly, Amgen and Andreessen Horowitz. The bulk of the funds will be used to develop its lead program, azelaprag (BGE-105), which will be tested in clinical trials for obesity in combination with incretin drugs such as Eli Lilly's Zepbound (tirzepatide).

Fortney has a PhD in bioinformatics from the University of Toronto and did a postdoctoral fellowship in aging, genetics and bioinformatics at Stanford University



Najat Khan

Chief Data Science Officer

Johnson & Johnson

Najat Khan, chief data science officer and global head of strategy and portfolio organization for Innovative Medicine R&D at Johnson & Johnson, is responsible for shaping the pharma company's R&D strategic vision. She works across multiple high-priority areas to ensure Johnson & Johnson continues to deliver transformational medicines for patients. This includes building new capabilities such as creating a best-in-class R&D data science organization by selecting the highest priority questions to pursue, and systematically deploying data science capabilities, while being a key catalyst in forming strategic external partnerships to accelerate on-going efforts.

Khan also collaborates with the various Johnson & Johnson R&D therapeutic and functional heads, as well as commercial and business development leaders on a wide variety of cross-functional strategic, portfolio-related and operational priorities.

Prior to her current role, Khan was the head of R&D strategic initiatives at Johnson & Johnson. In a brief period, she was able to develop and execute a comprehensive program comprising of more than 25 of Johnson & Johnson's R&D strategic initiatives, and was instrumental in launching its data science efforts, defining the R&D strategy and enhancing early-stage external innovation.

Before Johnson & Johnson, Khan was a principal at Boston Consulting Group (BCG) where she led and executed multiple strategic initiatives across research, commercial, business and clinical development, in addition to M&A and operations.

**Linxian Li**

Founder & CEO

Shenzhen Shenxin Biotechnology

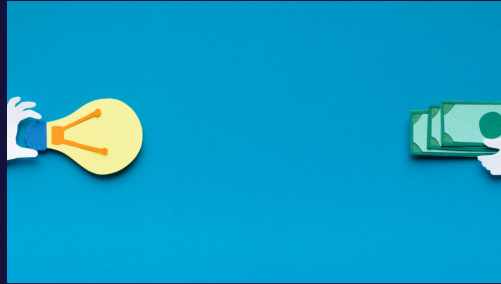
Linxian Li, a biomedical engineer with interdisciplinary expertise in organic chemistry, molecular biology, materials science and bioengineering, is founder and CEO of Shenzhen Shenxin Biotechnology (InnoRNA).

InnoRNA develops messenger RNA-based vaccines for prevention of respiratory syncytial virus, herpes zoster and COVID-19. Its lipid nanoparticle delivery technology is one of the most sought after in China. The company has world-leading R&D laboratories in Shenzhen, Nanjing and Hong Kong.

Linxian obtained a PhD from Ruprecht Karl University of Heidelberg in 2014 and then went on to study biological materials at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

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Lori Lyons-Williams

President & CEO
Abdera Therapeutics

Abdera Therapeutics CEO, Lori Lyons-Williams, has more than 20 years of experience across multinational pharma and emerging biotech companies. Abdera launched in 2023 with \$142m in combined series A and B funding to advance a fleet of radiopharmaceuticals.

Most recently, she was president and chief operating officer of Neumora, a clinical-stage biotechnology company pioneering precision medicines for brain diseases, where she helped raise more than \$500m in the company's series A financing.

Lyons-Williams is on the board of directors for two clinical-stage biopharmaceutical companies, RAPT Therapeutics, focused on cancer and inflammatory disease, and Pipeline Therapeutics, focused on pioneering precision neuro-regeneration.

She holds a bachelor's degree from Virginia Tech and an MBA from the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota.

**Trevor Martin**

Co-Founder & CEO

Mammoth Biosciences

Mammoth Biosciences is developing novel clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats (CRISPR) systems. With a distinguished team, including co-founder and CRISPR-Cas genome editing co-inventor Jennifer Doudna, Mammoth is addressing challenges across health care, agriculture, environmental monitoring, biodefense and more.

Co-founder and CEO, Trevor Martin, is a first-time CEO who earned his bachelor's degree from Princeton University and PhD in biology from Stanford University.

Mammoth has secured collaborations with multiple pharma companies, including Bayer and Vertex. In 2021, the biotech secured itself "unicorn" status with a valuation of more than \$1bn. In September that year, the company raised a \$150m series D funding led by Redmile Group, with participation from Foresite Capital, Senator Investment Group,

Sixth Street, Greenspring Associates, Mayfield, Decheng Capital, NFX and Plum Alley, among others. It follows a \$45m series C in late 2020, which was led by Redmile Group and Foresite Capital, and included participation from Amazon as well as existing investors.



Addie MacGregor

Sustainability Manager
Association of British HealthTech Industries

"We know many other countries are looking at the NHS as the benchmark – which is 'massive' for a relatively small economy." The way the NHS works makes it easier to apply nationwide requirements."

In 2022, Addie MacGregor became the first sustainability executive at the Association of British HealthTech Industries (ABHI).

Now as a sustainability manager, MacGregor provides support to the membership and works with stakeholders to ensure the role of sustainability within HealthTech is recognized. In managing the ABHI Sustainability Group, she is helping the industry tackle the opportunities and challenges that exist on such a complex topic.

Previously, MacGregor was a webinar coordinator for One In a Million, a sustainable fashion campaign. She holds a master's degree in sustainability and management from Royal Holloway, University of London.

**Lara Mott**

Co-Founder & CEO
ImproveWell

ImproveWell, led by CEO and co-founder Lara Mott, is an award-winning, real-time feedback solution for improvement and everyday innovation in the UK's National Health Service (NHS).

Mott has experience in health care private equity, biotechnology and life sciences consulting businesses. She has a passion for tackling key issues facing the NHS and other health care systems around the world.

ImproveWell was founded in 2016 as a digital staff engagement solution for improving quality in health care. It aims to empower frontline health care professionals to drive change.

In 2019, Mott was a finalist for Entrepreneur of the Year at the Women in IT and

Inclusive Tech Alliance Awards; and became the British Medical Journal's first entrepreneur in residence.

Mott holds a degree in pharmacology from Bristol University where she was awarded the Hans Heller Memorial Prize for outstanding performance.



Jack O'Meara

Co-Founder & CEO

Ochre Bio

*"We work in a sector where we want to make people better and the world a happier place
... It is also concurrently the sector that the public hates more than any other."*

A biomedical engineer by training, Jack O'Meara has held many roles. In 2015, he co-founded Venture for Ireland, an entrepreneurship fellowship that placed top Irish graduates into UK start-ups. Following this, O'Meara worked for AveXis, Novartis' gene therapy wing, where he helped support the approval process and subsequent launch of Zolgensma (onasemnogene abeparvovec), the company's revolutionary treatment for spinal muscular atrophy.

Now, he heads Ochre Bio, a company looking to combat liver disease – a condition that is responsible for nearly 2 million deaths worldwide each year.

The company designs and builds small-interfering (si) RNA molecules – double stranded DNA fragments that are 20-24 base pairs in length – which target the underlying genetic expressions responsible for liver disease.

Ochre's last fundraise was back in 2022. The company received \$30m from a wide syndicate of institutional investors, including Khosla Ventures, Hermes-Epitek, Backed VC, LifeForce Capital, Selvedge, AixThera, LifeLink, and EIT.

**Tuyen Ong**

CEO

Ring Therapeutics

Tuyen Ong is an accomplished biotechnology and pharmaceutical executive with a wealth of experience in company growth, R&D and gene therapy. He has a passion for driving progress in life sciences and bringing innovation to patients, having led the development of breakthrough treatments for retinopathies and rare diseases.

He joined Flagship Pioneering in 2020 where he serves as both a CEO-partner and CEO of Ring Therapeutics.

Before Flagship, he was senior vice president, head of the ophthalmology franchise, at Biogen and chief development officer at Nightstar Therapeutics until it was acquired by Biogen in 2019. While there, he was involved with the company's NASDAQ initial public offering, as well as investor and M&A activities. Prior to this, Tuyen was a chief medical officer at PTC Therapeutics where he was responsible for progressing its pipeline of

therapies for rare and orphan diseases.

Founded in 2017 by Flagship Labs, Ring Therapeutics is developing first-in-class gene therapies, known as Anellovector therapies, using a novel viral vector platform based on its work on the human commensal virome. In March 2023, the company raised \$86.5m in a series C funding round, bringing its total funds raised to date to \$230m.



Jason Park

Co-Founder & CEO
Empress Therapeutics

Jason Park is an operating partner at Flagship Pioneering where he leads a team of entrepreneurial scientists to develop the science, intellectual property and business strategies behind many of Flagship's next breakthrough companies.

Park is a co-founder and member of the founding teams of Empress Therapeutics, where he is currently CEO, and Sonata Therapeutics, where he previously served as chief operating officer.

Prior to joining Flagship in 2015, he was a member of the Boston Consulting Group's Health Care and Technology practices, operating out of BCG's New York, Mumbai and Paris offices. His projects included several large life science M&A opportunities, and the design and implementation of a new funding model for a multinational global health organization focused on investing in innovative technologies and interventions.

Park holds bachelor's degree, master's degree and PhD in biomedical engineering from Yale University where his research focused on the use of nanotechnology for immunomodulatory purposes, and culminated in the invention and clinical use of a nanoparticle drug delivery platform.

**Rahul Purwar**

Founder & CEO
ImmunoACT

Rahul Purwar is the founder and CEO of ImmunoACT, an Indian cell and gene therapy company, which launched India's first indigenously developed CD19-targeted CAR-T cell therapy in 2023. The company's NexCAR19 (actalycabtagene autoleucel) was approved in India in October 2023 for the treatment of relapsed/refractory B-cell lymphomas and leukemia.

The prohibitive cost of current CAR-T cell therapies puts them beyond the reach of most patients in the developing world and Purwar hopes to rewrite that script. NexCAR19 has a "vein-to-vein" time – the time between collection of T-cells to CAR-T infusion – of 18 days and ImmunoACT expects to price the product in the INR4-4.5m (\$48,048-54,054) range.

Founded in 2018, ImmunoACT was incubated under the aegis of the Indian Institute of

Technology-Bombay business incubator, Society for Innovation and Entrepreneurship.



Aleksandra Rizo

President & CEO

Vividion Therapeutics

Aleksandra Rizo has been CEO of Vividion since January 2023, joining the company as head of R&D in July 2022. Vividion is utilizing novel, industry leading chemoproteomics drug discovery technologies to unlock high value, traditionally undruggable targets with precision therapeutics for cancers and immune disorders.

In February 2021, Vividion raised a \$135m series C financing round, co-led by new investors, Logos Capital and Boxer Capital, of Tavistock Group. Later that year, the company was acquired by Bayer. The big pharma said at the time, “To preserve its entrepreneurial culture as an essential pillar for nurturing successful innovation, Vividion will continue to operate as an independent organization on an arm’s length basis.”

Since joining the company, Rizo has helped to advance three programs into the clinic that are addressing high profile cancer targets. In the 2024 to 2026 timeline, home-grown assets in the immunology space are planned to follow.

**Nabiha Saklayen**

Co-Founder & CEO

Cellino Biotech

Cellino is a company focused on the biomanufacturing of regenerative medicines to make the theory of “Your Cells, Your Cure” a reality for patients.

Cellino CEO and co-founder, Nabiha Saklayen, focused her PhD research on bio/nanophotonics technologies to unlock precision cellular engineering for human health applications. Her expertise inspired Cellino’s proprietary approach: an autonomous, optical bioprocess that unlocks the ultra-scalable manufacturing of regenerative medicines.

Saklayen is the inaugural Tory Burch Foundation Fellow in genomics at the Innovative Genomics Institute, led by Nobel laureate Jennifer Doudna. Saklayen received her PhD from Harvard University as a Howard Hughes Medical Institute International Fellow. She also co-created I Am A Scientist, an educational program in 50 states that inspires

children to explore science.



Dominik Schumacher

Co-Founder & CEO

Tubulis

Dominik Schumacher founded Tubulis together with chief scientific officer Jonas Helma-Smets in 2018 and since then has grown Tubulis into a successful, well financed company with leading global investors and top talent in the team. Tubulis is a biotech company developing next generation antibody-drug conjugates (ADCs).

In 2023, Schumacher led two deals for the company: a strategic licensing deal with pharma partner Bristol Myers Squibb to develop differentiated ADCs; and the licensing of hematological program Tub-010 to Oncoteq.

2024 will be a big year for Tubulis with its first solid tumor program entering the clinic.

Prior to Tubulis, Schumacher worked at the Leibniz Research Institute for Molecular Pharmacology and as a group leader at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich, Germany. Schumacher currently acts as an angel investor to support the next generation of young biotech entrepreneurs. He obtained his PhD from the Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany and studied chemistry and economics at the Heinrich Heine University in Dusseldorf.



Amanda Spina

President, J&J Innovative Medicine Brazil
Janssen (Johnson & Johnson)

In March 2024, Amanda Spina was named the first female president of Interfarma in Brazil. Founded in 1990, Interfarma is a non-profit sector entity that represents national and foreign companies and researchers responsible for health innovation in Brazil.

Spina said in an interview for Interfarma that the organization sought not only to boost growth and innovation in the biopharma sector, but also to "contribute to the development of the Brazilian economy as a whole, promoting ethical, responsible and inclusive practices and with constant dialogue between the various actors in the sector."

She is currently president of J&J Brazil, a role she has held since the start of 2023. She leads a team of around 1,000 employees. Prior to joining Janssen, she spent many years at Abbott, in roles of increasing responsibility in the sales and marketing team.

Spina holds a degree in marketing from Escola Superior de Propaganda e Marketing (ESPM) and an MBA from the same institution.



Clare Terlouw

Head
LifeArc Ventures

"It is so important to de-risk the things that you can control, because in biotech so much is beyond your control."

Clare Terlouw brings years of expertise funding innovative life sciences companies in the private and public markets to LifeArc Ventures, an investment company that focuses on early-stage life sciences companies at seed to series A, with significant follow-on investment reserved for successful portfolio companies.

Terlouw was previously head of corporate development at Syncona Investment Management and before that worked in biotech and health care financing for 15 years as a UK investment banker at Nomura, Numis Securities and Peel Hunt.

She was a physiotherapist in Canada prior to moving into finance.

Terlouw is a board member of the UK Biotechnology Industry Association and director of several venture-backed companies.

**Roman Thomas**

Co-Founder & CEO
DISCO Pharmaceuticals

DISCO Pharmaceuticals emerged from stealth mode in January 2024 with \$21.8m funding to bring its cell surface mapping technology-developed candidates to oncology therapeutics.

AbbVie's venture capital arm, Panakes Partners, and M Ventures contributed to the financing round, which was led by Sofinnova Partners.

Disco has developed a mapping platform for the cancer surface proteome, called the surfaceome. The company's technology identifies proteins across the entire cancer cell surface to uncover potential target candidates for mono- and bispecific antibodies.

Founded in May 2022, Disco spun out of public research university Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) Zurich. Its founders hailed from ETH along with the University of

Cologne and Stanford University. Cologne's professor of translational genomics, Roman Thomas, is leading the company.

As an avid biotech entrepreneur, Thomas founded NEO New Oncology in 2012 (acquired by Siemens in 2016), PearlRiver Bio in 2019 (acquired by Centessa in 2021) and Epiphanes Inc. in 2019. He obtained a medical degree from the University of Cologne and performed postdoctoral work at the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard University.



Agne Vaitkeviciene

CEO
Memel Biotech

Agne Vaitkeviciene juggles many roles.

First and foremost, she is the CEO of Memel Biotech, a Lithuanian clinical development and manufacturing organization which offers comprehensive services covering manufacturing, development and regulatory support to those wishing to develop advanced therapy medicinal products (ATMPs).

She also serves as the vice president of LithuaniaBio, a non-governmental organization that represents companies, research and study institutions and health care institutions in the fields of diagnostics, health technologies and biotechnology.

Another role of hers is as the chief operating officer of Cureline Baltic, a contract research organization, and the chief executive officer of Memel Biotech, a company which offers services to those wishing to develop ATMPs.

And, if that was not enough, Vaitkeviciene also lectures at two universities – Klaipeda and Vilnius.

**Sandra von Meier**

Head of Business Development & Licensing
Debiopharm

As head of business development and licensing at Debiopharm, Sandra von Meier is responsible for all licensing activities at the company. Von Meier closed the recent in-licensing of a ubiquitin-specific protease inhibitor from Novo Nordisk/Forma as well as a multi-asset partnership with SunRock to develop novel HER/HER3 antibody drug conjugates to add to Debiopharm's oncology pipeline and a recent collaboration with Repare.

Before joining Debiopharm, von Meier was senior director of business development and licensing at Bayer, responsible for oncology asset search, evaluation and transaction including the recent M&A with Vividion Therapeutics. Prior to Bayer, as director of business development, oncology, at Merck KGaA, she led numerous transactions, including the strategic collaboration for Xevinapant (Debio 1143), which involved deals with F-star for bispecific antibodies, Vertex for double data rate portfolio and Pfizer for

Bavencio (avelumab).

Von Meier studied biochemistry at the Free University of Berlin and then moved to London for her diploma at the Institute of Cancer Research. She holds a PhD from University College London.



Hanadie Yousef

Co-Founder & CEO

Juvena Therapeutics

Hanadie Yousef is an expert on the biology of aging and mechanisms underlying tissue degeneration with over two decades of experience in biomedical research. In 2018, she launched Juvena Therapeutics, a venture-backed biotechnology company mapping the therapeutic potential of secreted proteins to develop biologics that prevent, reverse and cure chronic and age-related diseases.

The company has secured around \$60m in funding to date and developed a proprietary pro-regenerative protein library supported by a computationally driven drug discovery and development platform that enables them to characterize human stem cell-secreted proteins for therapeutic potential. Its AI-enhanced platform leverages multiple data modalities and technologies, including quantitative proteomics, multi-omics, high-content imaging and machine learning.

Yousef's published research has been supported by fellowships and grants from the National Institute of Health, National Science Foundation, SPARK and the California Institute for Regenerative.

**Alice Zhang**

Co-Founder & CEO

[Verge Genomics](#)

Verge Genomics, a tech-enabled drug discovery company using AI and human data to develop new drugs, closed a \$98m equity financing in December 2021. The series B financing was led by funds managed by BlackRock and supported by new health care and technology investors, including Eli Lilly and Company, Merck Global Health Innovation Fund (Merck GHI), Section 32 and Vulcan Capital, alongside existing investors.

Verge has built an end-to-end, AI-driven drug discovery platform that includes one of the field's largest proprietary genomic datasets from human brain tissue. In July 2021, the company announced a partnership with Lilly to develop new treatments for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis using its platform. In 2023, Verge also announced a partnership with AstraZeneca's Alexion to use AI to discover drugs for rare neurodegenerative and neuromuscular diseases. (Also see "[Lilly/Verge Pact Shows](#)

[Resistance To Biopharma AI Is Futile](#) - Scrip, 8 Jul, 2021.)

Co-founder and first-time CEO Alice Zhang joined the company in 2015. Prior to Verge, she spent five years in the University of California, Los Angeles-Caltech MD/PhD program and received her bachelor's degree from Princeton University in molecular biology. In her spare time, Zhang is an angel investor and advisor for tech-enabled bio startups.

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