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Rising Up In Biopharma: Optimism, AI And Perseverance

Current Trends Should Not Be The Only Focus For Value Generation

by **In Vivo Team**

Ahead of *In Vivo*'s 2024 Rising Leaders list being revealed in April, a panel of biopharma leaders discussed industry trends and biopharma career stories at BIO-Europe Spring.

In a biopharma ecosystem with reduced cash flow, even established companies must focus more on demonstrating their unique value proposition.

Companies of all sizes are concentrating on how to “show in packages that you're a lower risk, higher return asset. That's a very interesting movement compared to what we had a few years ago, when there was a lot more cash in the system,” Angeli Möller, [Roche Holding AG](#)'s head of data and integration generating insights (DIGI), told a BIO-Europe Spring panel.

The session, moderated by *In Vivo* executive editor, Lucie Ellis-Taitt, included 2020 Rising Leader Möller, 2023 Rising Leader Miquel Vila-Perelló, CEO of [SpliceBio, S.L.](#), and a preview for 2024, Sandra von Meier, head of business development & licensing at [Debiopharm S.A.](#)

Financing challenges were top of mind for all three panelists. Vila-Perelló, though, was optimistic. He noted, “The biotech IPO market is opening up again, VC funding rounds are also going up and we're seeing some movement on the M&A front.” These were all positive cues for a revival in 2024, he said.

Perseverance Can Be Rewarded

On the back of a tough financial environment for biopharma, it was important to recognize the value of perseverance, the panelists agreed.

Vila-Perelló highlighted the antibody drug conjugate (ADC) sector as a key example. This was a field he described a few years ago as burgeoning but that “went completely dead for some time.” But the tide has turned and ADC technologies have been scoring significant biopharma dollars in the last 18 months, through alliance and acquisition deals. (Also see "[ADCs Coming Of Age: Deals, Targets And Catalysts](#)" - In Vivo, 12 Apr, 2023.)

“People kept going even when it was not fashionable,” said the SpliceBio CEO. “We often talk about trends, but sometimes it’s the things that are not trending but will eventually come back.”

What goes around comes around was the theme von Meier discussed during the panel. She noted the move by some investors and big pharmas away from oncology. She highlighted the trend toward cardiovascular and metabolic research and investment, which is reflective of pharma strategies from years ago of targeting large indications over niche areas.

“Persistence is a key value in any industry,” said Vila-Perelló, even if it is not a “super flashy” skill.

Möller highlighted [Insilico Medicine](#) as an example of the biopharma industry needing time to catch up with technology. The company was founded in 2014 but is now being recognized for its innovative approach to drug discovery and development. In June 2023, Insilico Medicine dosed the first patient in a Phase II trial of a treatment for idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis – a treatment identified and designed using its generative AI platform. In the same year, the company’s AI-powered target-discovery engine, PandaOmics, completed a first-of-its-kind identification of “dual purpose” targets: genes that can be targeted for both anti-aging and brain tumor treatments.

“Trends come and go. When you see these true entrepreneurs and innovators sticking by something year after year and then ultimately winning, I think that’s tremendously rewarding,” Möller said.

Not Using AI Tools Is A Mistake

As well as her role at Roche, Möller is a member of the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) for UK Research and Innovation, a non-departmental public body; and she is co-founder of the Alliance for Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare (AAIH).

Well qualified to discuss the future of AI in biopharma, Möller said, “Machine learning is a tool... If you have a tool where there's lots of scientific evidence to show that it could give you a better outcome at a lower cost in a shorter timeline, why wouldn't you choose to use it?”

But she recognized the potential challenges of translating technology investment into value. “What is valuable is whether or not the product you've developed makes a difference for patients and key opinion leaders,” she said.

Still, AI and machine learning tools do offer significant competitive advantages, Möller believes. “If you're not using machine learning, if you're not using in silico modelling in your clinical trial optimization, in your probability of drug success modeling and in your drug discovery pipeline, you've just tied one of your hands behind your back.”

In Vivo's 2024 Rising Leaders list will be published in April, spotlighting a new generation of talent across the biopharma, medtech and healthtech sectors.