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Vividion's Breakthrough Science Is Fueling Bayer's Pipeline

by [Lucie Ellis-Taitt](#)

Leveraging the biotech entrepreneurial spirit and global pharma resources is a win-win situation in the race to bring meaningful medicines to patients.

“No company can advance science alone, and both [Vividion Therapeutics, Inc.](#) and [Bayer AG](#) have passion to make things work and find solutions quickly – this is what unites us,” said Vividion Therapeutics CEO Aleksandra Rizo, one of 2024's Rising Leaders.



Chemoproteomics specialist Vividion Therapeutics is a biotech that is currently owned by Bayer but operates as an independent entity. The company, founded in 2013, is in “an unparalleled position to generate medicines and bring them to market for the benefit of the patient,” Rizo told *In Vivo*.

Bayer paid \$1.5bn upfront in 2021 to get hold of San Diego-based Vividion, which is developing a pipeline of precision therapeutics for traditionally undruggable targets in oncology and immunology. (Also see "[The Inside Story On How Bayer Swooped On NASDAQ-Bound Vividion](#)" - Scrip, 5 Aug, 2021.)

In 2023, Rizo was promoted to president and CEO and joined the board of directors of Vividion. Previously, she was head of R&D.

Prior to joining Vividion, Rizo was executive vice president and chief medical officer of Geron Corporation, where she provided leadership and direction for all clinical and translational efforts. She also held previous leadership roles at Celgene and Johnson & Johnson.

Founded by Scripps Research chemists Benjamin Cravatt, Phil Baran and Jin-Quan Yu, Vividion is based on an industry-leading chemoproteomics platform combining a fragment-based screening technology with a proprietary library of covalent small molecules. This platform has

enabled the company to identify hundreds of previously unknown or cryptic functional pockets on well-validated protein targets implicated in a wide range of diseases, while simultaneously identifying compounds that interact in a highly selective manner with those pockets. “With our approach we can target transcription factors and degraders, and these were previously undruggable classes. This is really the uniqueness of our platform and of our research,” Rizo said. “Our screening capabilities are world-leading in terms of throughput and robustness.”



ALEKSANDRA RIZO

The CEO Role

Vividion marks Rizo’s first CEO position. “It’s part of my personality to take on new challenges and I enjoy learning and riding the wave.”

Thinking about her career journey, Rizo highlighted the experiences and opportunities of studying and working in different countries across the globe. “The opportunity to explore and learn about different cultures is helping me have more meaningful and deeper interactions with my colleagues and has shaped me into the leader that I am today.”

Under Rizo’s leadership, Vividion has transitioned from discovery to a clinical-stage company.

In September 2023, the company started a Phase I oncology clinical trial of its investigational oral Kelch-like ECH Associated Protein 1 (KEAP1) activator, VVD-130037, in patients with advanced solid tumors.

Then, in February 2024, the company initiated a Phase I trial evaluating VVD-130850, an investigational oral STAT3 inhibitor for the treatment of advanced solid and hematologic tumors.

“We are proud of the progress we have made in a relatively short amount of time with a pipeline consisting of previously undruggable protein targets for prominent oncology and immunology diseases,” Rizo said at the time.

She added: “We are excited to see the data coming out of the studies for our homegrown medicines.”

“Diversity of thought is very important.”

Oncology R&D is a crowded marketplace, but Rizo sees a lot of white space for innovation. “Within traditional drug discovery, despite the advances that have been achieved so far [in oncology], we have drugs for only 10% of the disease-causing proteins. This is where Vividion comes in. We are working hard to change this percentage and advance this research into meaningful benefits for patients.”

Identifying optimal targets amidst the multitude generated by the company's platform is paramount. The team stays “close to the science” to understand the disease landscape, disease models and the platform to select the most promising candidates, Rizo said. In addition to oncology, Vividion is also building a pipeline in immunology, a field of many underserved diseases with globally increasing incidence and prevalence.

A Biotech Within Big Pharma

As a wholly owned subsidiary of Bayer, Vividion maintains an entrepreneurial spirit while accessing global resources. “The stability and resources are there, and this really helps accelerate and advance programs much faster,” Rizo said. “It's really a win-win situation.”

“Diversity of thought is very important,” she said, noting that the big pharma and biotech units bring mixed perspectives and help advance projects better and faster.

Looking ahead, Rizo is hopeful that in the near future Vividion will be able to bring to market a new oncology drug from its platform and bring a pipeline of immunology programs to the clinic.