

By Kim Ribbink and Taren Grom

Innovator's Journey

Every entrepreneur's path is unique, yet they share some core characteristics. They are willing to take calculated risks, they are visionary, they are fearless, and they are always thinking about the next big thing.

The statistics are somewhat sobering: 20% of new companies fail in their first year, and only 50% survive through their fifth year. In spite of those numbers, there are close to 600 million entrepreneurs worldwide. The life-sciences industry has been the beneficiary of many of these innovators who have taken and continue to take on new business opportunities.

PharmaVOICE has the privilege of connecting with entrepreneurs across the life-sciences spectrum.

We are continually inspired by their ability to break new ground, create new ways of problem-solving, face adversity head on, and find new ways to benefit patients. We are pleased to share just a few of these individuals' inspiring journeys.

Good Bones



STEVEN MICHAELSON
Founder and CEO
Calcium

When Steven Michaelson, who was at the height of his career as a creative executive, decided to start his first advertising agency, Wishbone, he turned to his wife Judy Capano and said: "Come on, let's burn the ships." It's what the explorer Hernán Cortés told his first mate when the crew landed in South America. The indigenous

people weren't friendly, the men were starving, some had scurvy, and there were threats of mutiny. The order to "burn the ships" meant there was no turning back.

That's Steven's advice to entrepreneurs. Jump in. Don't be afraid to take a risk. You won't always know what to do or what problems will arise, but that's part of the fun. "As creatives and advertising execs, we're problem solvers, and that's what entrepreneurship is all about," he says.

In 1998, Steven started his first agency, Wishbone — named to capture the concept of dreams and aspirations denoted from that of, well, a wishbone. After selling Wishbone in 2010 and spending one year to help the business transition, Steven began his next foray into entrepreneurship, founding his

second agency Calcium in late 2012, which was a natural brand extension on his first agency. "What is Calcium? Calcium is the growth element that makes bones stronger and it seemed to be the right fit," Steven says. "What a cool name, and specifically for our industry to be about an element, specifically about the growth element. Brand Nourishment is our tagline, and that's what we do. We're all about nourishing growing brands and our clients' business, but most importantly, we are about nourishing our people and making sure that they get everything they need. We are truly a people first agency."

There's nothing Steven would rather do. "I love putting together a company. I love the dream, the camaraderie in working with people to create something, building a culture, business planning, working to win business, and watching the agency grow," he says.

The success both agencies have enjoyed stems in large part from the vision and mission Steven set. "We didn't want to be the biggest, we wanted to be one of

Entrepreneurship Statistics:

- ▶ 62% of US billionaires are self-made.
- ▶ In 2016, there were 25 million Americans who were starting or already running their own business.
- ▶ No. 1 reason why businesses fail is there's no market need.
- ▶ 60% of people who start small businesses are between the ages of 40 and 60.
- ▶ There are 582 million entrepreneurs in the world.
- ▶ 22.5% of small businesses fail within the first year.

Source: Smallbizgenius

the best — not just with strategy, creative, and the service that we deliver for our clients, but also doing right for our people by building a safe space for them to fulfill their career dreams and creating an environment that treats people fairly and appreciates their work."

The core values at Calcium are commitment, integrity, and respect. "We have a 'no jerks' policy at Calcium," Steven says. "People are committed to what they do, we insist on integrity, which means doing what you said you were going to do and having your teammates' backs, and the third part is treating everyone with respect."

While Steven loves forming businesses and working with great teams, there was one issue he hadn't quite prepared for when he set up Wishbone: the financial side.

"As a creative I never really thought about making money; I always thought about doing great work and money would come," he says. "Then all of

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a sudden I didn't have a salary, which was a shock after working my entire life — from the age of 11. I didn't expect it to bother me the way it did, but it also got me motivated to put together my call list.”

From that moment, Steven began to celebrate every small victory — from a prospective client calling him — a win — to putting together a presentation — another win — to winning a piece of business — a huge win.

“That continues today, whether it's hiring somebody who I really want on board or building a department or creating something great for a client, it's about celebrating every little victory that we have,” he says.

Doctor, Physician-Scientist, Game Changer



MICHELLE LONGMIRE, M.D.
CEO and Co-Founder
Medable Inc.

While at Stanford doing her residency in dermatology and carrying out clinical research on patients with rare conditions, Dr. Michelle Longmire had an epiphany. Being in the heart of Silicon Valley around 2015, she realized that the industry was underutilizing technology in patient care and research. She began

thinking about how she could use technology to advance research and healthcare delivery outside of the walls of Stanford and to look at it through the lens of an entrepreneur.

As she mulled these ideas, Michelle noticed a flyer for a Stanford start-up challenge. She entered and won \$10,000 for her concept of developing a system for patients and doctors to connect more seamlessly and drive a fundamental change around patients accessing healthcare and clinical research. With the idea in place, she turned to a branding professional, Steve Cecil, who suggested the name Medable, and in 2015 the company was formed.

As an entrepreneur, Michelle has learned that every phase of building a business is new, and start-ups are operating against a set of unknowns. She says there are ways to standardize operations to ensure reliability and scalability, but at the same time, the unknowns are also what makes the job of starting a new company fun, as is being able to chart her own course and build a team to drive change.

Since starting Medable, and particularly since 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic, Michelle has seen far more rapid movement toward decentralized digital clinical trials. And she is excited about what this means for patients.

“We have proof points around how decentralized digital virtual clinical trials actually improve access and can drive the development of new medicines,” she says. “We know now that when patients are able to access a clinical trial online, using telemedicine and remote

consent, most clinical trials will enroll three times faster. That's an incredible data point that we didn't know before COVID-19.”

Michelle, who has been at the forefront of evangelizing decentralized clinical trials since founding Medable, believes there is now a new paradigm in healthcare broadly and in clinical trials with across-the-board support for digital medicine. The company's tagline says it all: decentralized trials, delivered on a global platform to unify clinical trial solutions.

“I believe the momentum we are seeing will lead to a future that is defined by better access, more patient-centricity, and ultimately, I hope, faster timelines to getting therapies to the broader patient population,” she says.

It is Michelle's goal to provide value to clinical trial participants. “I think we're falling short as an industry when we lose sight of the fact that patients enroll in clinical trials because they want a new treatment option,” she says. “We want to accelerate timelines for those therapies that have safety and efficacy data.”

Michelle's advice for prospective entrepreneurs is to think about what they are passionate about and identify how that maps to an unmet need, then go for it.

“It's easy to look at a future state and think people started there, but they didn't,” she says. “I look back to where I started and who would believe we would be where we are now. I did all-night hack-a-thons while working as a dermatology resident. If you really believe in what you are doing, you will find a path forward.”

From Star Wars to Genre Creator



SAM GLASSENBERG
CEO and Founder
Level Ex

Careers in the life sciences and medicine are often seen as a lifelong calling. But for some, the move into healthcare is more serendipitous. Despite being from a long line of doctors — his grandfather, both his parents, aunts, uncles, even his wife — Sam Glassenberg took a very different path: designing video games.

From Lucas Films to managing a key gaming technology at Microsoft, Sam had built a stellar reputation in the industry. Yet despite Sam's many career successes, including winning a Technical Emmy for interactive entertainment, his dad kept up the pressure

for a move into medicine. “Finally, my father gave up, and said all right Sam, put all this gaming nonsense to good use and make me a game to train my colleagues to do a fiberoptic intubation, a rare and difficult procedure,” Sam says. The request was a game that doctors could play on their phones as a way to practice.

Over the course of three weekends, Sam put a game together, uploaded it to the App Store, shared the link with his father, and forgot about it — that was, until his father asked two years later: Sam, how many people downloaded the game?

“I looked and saw that 100,000 doctors, nurses, and airway specialists worldwide had been playing this thing,” Sam says. “I had by

accident created one of the most popular medical simulator training tools ever. At which point, I Googled it to try to figure out what was going on and I discovered unbeknownst to me they had been doing efficacy studies on this little game I made for my dad and it was improving performance.”

That was the launch of what was to become a new genre in game design — video games for medical professionals. “I thought, what if we actually took the top video game designers, artists, and engineers from around the industry and teamed them with physician advisors and contributors to capture the challenges of practicing medicine using video game technology,” he says.

The result was Level Ex, since acquired by Brainlab, and the company has set out to advance the practice of medicine through play. To date, the company has developed mobile games in four specialties — anesthesiology, gastroenterology, pulmonology, and cardi-

ology — and is used by more than 700,000 medical professionals, and there are plans to expand into many other areas. Top 20 pharmaceutical and medical device companies, national medical societies, and government organizations, including NASA also leverage Level Ex for education and training. The next big push is into diagnosis. “Capturing the challenges of diagnosis is a puzzle,” Sam says. “It’s the strategy of longitudinal treatment of the patient across their journey, understanding complex systems, mechanism of action, and mechanism of disease.”

Level Ex has also started investing in cloud gaming technology to enable different parties to interact with the same virtual patient via mobile or web browser from anywhere in the world. This marks the first application of cloud gaming technology in healthcare.

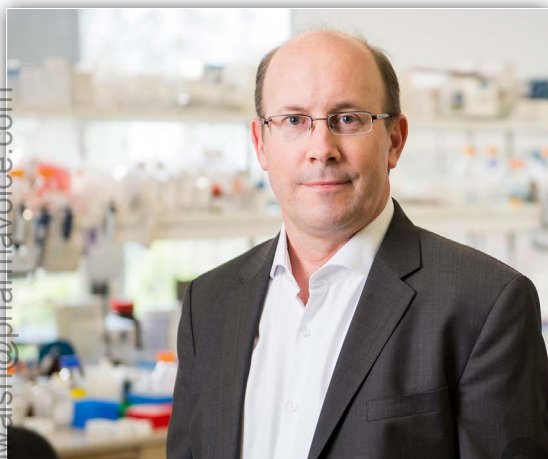
In addition to the traditional engineering, arts, and design teams, Level Ex has a team of biomedical engineers and full-time doctors

on hand to work with the designers. The ground-breaking work that Sam and his team are doing has led to awards for technology and design. “We’ve created a new genre in games, which for game creators is the greatest achievement that a company can have in the video game business, and we are tremendously proud of this,” he says.

“There’s no reference for what we are doing,” Sam says. “No game studio has medical physicians on staff or biomedical engineers on staff, so what’s the profile that we hire for and how do we structure the organization? We’re figuring out these problems as we go.”

Sam says he envisions a future where doctors no longer need to practice on live patients to develop a mental model for how complex systems work. “I imagine a world where physicians can learn by playing the latest games based on the most difficult cases that their colleagues are encountering, at their own convenience, using the device in their pocket.”

Creating Something Out of Nothing



TROY WILSON, PH.D.
CEO and Co-Founder
Kura Oncology Inc.

Building ideas and building teams is what excites Dr. Troy Wilson about being an entrepreneur. Multiple times, Troy has been part of the journey that starts with an idea that ultimately results in marketed products that impact the lives of employees, their families, and crucially patients.

“Being an entrepreneur is completely addictive,” Troy says. “I love creating something out of nothing, and I love even more when people say ‘that’s crazy’ but then two or five years later, they are saying ‘I knew it would work’ or ‘I had the same idea.’ That’s gratifying.”

The idea for Kura Oncology emerged while Troy and three other co-founders were starting another company called Wellspring

Biosciences. Wellspring had been built with support from Johnson & Johnson based on the discovery of small molecule inhibitors of the KRAS G12C mutant oncoprotein, a mutation particularly relevant to patients with non-small cell lung cancer.

The Wellspring team had another drug discovery program it was working on internally, and Troy was looking at how to take the company to the next level.

“I started looking for molecules that fit nicely with our evolving story and, after some discussion with our then chief scientific officer Yi Liu, we discovered tipifarnib which, lo and behold, was owned by J&J,” Troy says. “After much discussion with the head of oncology research and development, J&J supported us taking it on, and after further discussion with an investor who advised us not to dilute what we had with J&J, we decided to go ahead and create a new company anyway, Kura Oncology.”

Kura’s name pays tribute to its origins as well. “Aras is a translation of the name Araxes a river that flows along the borders between Turkey and Armenia,” Troy says. “Wellspring is the headwaters and Kura is the next river downstream from Araxes. So, as we transitioned from one company to the next, it seemed like a fitting name.”

Next, the team at Kura brought in technology from the University of Michigan, which led to a drug discovery program in acute leukemia.

Today, Kura is a \$2.5 billion company with enough cash to open up the throttle and see what the organization can do, Troy says. In addition to tipifarnib, which is an oral,

investigational drug candidate being evaluating in patients with certain head and neck cancers that carry HRAS mutations, Kura is developing KO-539, an oral investigational drug candidate for the treatment of genetically defined AML patients with high unmet need.

“We are building Kura into a sustainable company that prioritizes great science, has a great working environment for its employees, and provides meaningful clinical benefit to patients and their families,” he says. “We know the molecules are potent and are well-tolerated. All the arrows are pointing in the right direction. But drug discovery and development is a little bit like trying to cross the Everglades while there’s raw meat hanging off of you. There’s danger around every turn. I’m optimistic. I think we’ve got two really good programs. We’ve also built an organization where potentially we could slot in a third program if we found the right match, and that’s the fun part.”

The one tough part of being an entrepreneur, Troy says — partly in jest — is that humans are complicated, and the challenge is getting a team of 100 to 150 people all going in the same direction. “I look at the amazing racing ships out on the ocean, with everyone on one side and then they all scramble over to the other side; that’s true teamwork,” Troy says. “In our industry, if everybody doesn’t know the direction we’re going in, the boom is going to knock you off the ship. The advantage is that everyone at Kura knows he or she impacts our business and the patients we serve. As a leader, that’s your best weapon — inspiring people to realize they matter.”

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Industry Rebel with a Vision



MIKE REA
CEO and Founder
IDEA Pharma

Twenty years ago, Mike Rea walked away from a big job at a big company, on a matter of principle, and had to make a big call to his wife an ocean away. “I walked out of a meeting where they tried to persuade me to stay and I phoned Clare, where it was 3 a.m., and I said I’ve just resigned, and she said ‘okay, I trust you.’”

Since that fateful phone call, Mike has not looked back. He had an idea about how pharma business should, and could, be done, and that thesis became IDEA Pharma. Early on, the company was a consultancy focused on digital, strategy, branding, and positioning. Today, IDEA Pharma has created strategic direction and positioning for eight of the 15 biggest launches in the last five years, including Ocrevus, and Opdivo.

“The name IDEA drew on the concept of idea farming, idea generation, idea incubation — all within the pharma industry,” he says.

In reflection, Mike admits the company started without a clear plan, but his intuitive understanding of the industry as well as his skills in relationship building provided a solid

foundation for what was to come. He readily admits he was more focused on winning business rather than running the business, so 10 years ago Mike brought on folks to run the operational aspects of IDEA Pharma and the company was off and running. Mike says he now has a leadership team that allows him to focus on what he is good at, which is vision setting rather than people management. “When bringing together a band of rebels and mavericks, I learned a company does need organization, systems, processes, and training,” he says. “I’m reading a great book — *Enemy of All Mankind: A True Story of Piracy, Power, and History’s First Global Manhunt* — by Steven Johnson, an innovation author. It’s about pirates and how well organized they are, because when you put so many dangerous people together they have to be.”

Part of Mike’s ethos has always been to only work with clients he and his colleagues respect and align with the vision of IDEA Pharma. Indeed, they have turned down million-dollar contracts because they realized the client did not fit with the company’s outlook and principles. “A lot of the great work that we’ve done has been because of our chemistry with clients, who want someone who will challenge them,” he says. “Those clients are the ones who’ll do great things. We’ve always had a self-identifying belief that allowed us to challenge the industry to think harder about the things that we believe in. I think we’ve been lucky because this attitude, this kind of authenticity, has reached the right clients.”

Despite or perhaps because of this independent-minded approach, over the years IDEA Pharma has been able to branch out and create what has become an industry standard for measuring innovation — the Pharmaceutical

Innovation Index, which weighs a company’s ability to deliver innovation through its pipeline to patients. The Innovation Index, now in its 11th year, came about when Mike and his colleagues were discussing what “good looks like” when strategizing product launches. “We started with the very simple question: if the same product was given to two different companies would the product end up in the same place? Of course we knew it wouldn’t. So, we dived into what it is about companies themselves that makes a difference to the products? We carried out a systematic examination to assess the ways in which companies are successful,” he says. “On our first index, J&J came out on top, and the first thing the company did was come to us and ask how it could do even better. That’s humility. AstraZeneca put it on the front page of its website the day it was No. 1.”

Today, Mike and his colleagues are focused on changing the mindset within pharma companies, to make them asymmetric learning organizations, with an objective of changing the way they think about and conduct R&D. “If there is an acceptance of inherent uncertainty and you start to lean into that, instead of pretending you can predict your way out of it, big things can happen because you see opportunity faster and there is a plan to learn,” he says.

This month, Mike is launching another company called Protodigm, which is a combination of prototype and paradigm, with the objective of carrying out more evidence generation and prototyping to learn.

As far as the future, Mike says hopefully IDEA Pharma will have transformed the way that R&D groups approach path to market strategy, and Protodigm will have transformed the way people generate evidence and make decisions. A rebel at heart still.

Billion-Dollar Aspirations



VIMAL NARAYANAN
Founder and CEO
MedTriX Healthcare

When your goal is to create a billion-dollar company, you have to have a big vision and a willingness to take big risks. And that’s what Vimal Narayanan is doing. He’s not afraid to lose and is fully embracing what it takes to be an entrepreneur.

“It’s not about being the smartest person in the room, being an entrepreneur is about not being afraid to lose or move out of your comfort zone,” he says. “Ultimately, though, the risk is worth it because entrepreneurs don’t only build businesses and create opportunities for individuals; they also build economies and countries.”

Entrepreneurship is very much part of Vimal’s personality. Looking back to his teens and his time in college, he was always organiz-

ing — whether leadership activities, funds, festivals, or even just activities with friends.

After a few years in the pharmaceutical industry, followed by senior roles on the services side, Vimal realized that he had the skills, knowledge, and determination to set up his own company.

“That ‘a-ha’ moment came when I was setting up a medical communications business in the Middle East for an agency network and realized I could do this myself,” he says.

The result of his vision and hard work was the launch of MedTriX Healthcare Communications in 2012. The company brings together a matrix of science, technology, and strategy to meet the commercial objectives of pharmaceutical and healthcare organizations.

Today, the company has a delivery center in India and offices with employees and clients worldwide. Over the past eight years, the company has grown rapidly and recently surpassed 1,000 projects. The company has a loyal list of clients, which allows MedTriX to gain deep insights into the way they work, cultural nuances, and preferences, while delivering innovative and cost-effective solutions. "In recent years we've created first-in-the-world technology products, especially in the area of AI, augmented reality, and machine learning, which is far from when we set up," Vimal says.

He leads by encouraging people to push themselves, by inculcating his values, skills,

and capabilities in others, and being a mentor. One of the best parts of being an entrepreneur, Vimal says is watching people grow and progress, whether personally or professionally. "Making a difference in someone's life is the greatest gift; it's what makes me smile each day and gives me the energy to put in long hours," he says.

Running a business always has its challenges and for Vimal that's keeping track of all the functions within the organization. "I own the business in its entirety, and we have a presence in the United States, Middle East, India, and Europe so I have to wear multiple hats," he says. "In any day, I need to be able to shift

from finance, to HR, to marketing and sales, to operations, to technology. To stay current, I spend about three hours a day reading about various work-related topics."

Vimal says his goal is to build MedTriX into a billion-dollar company that can leverage all of its capabilities such as content development, creative skills, technology, as well as best-in-class processes on a global basis. "We have the science, we have the technology, and we have fantastic industry know-how," he says. "We might have to acquire certain capabilities and sell others, but I think the goal of becoming a billion-dollar company in the next five to 10 years is very achievable."

An Entrepreneur Is Born



SUNNY WHITE
 Founder and CEO
 Xavier Creative
 House

There is little doubt that Sunny White would have become anything other than an entrepreneur — it's literally in her DNA. "I come from a family of entrepreneurs, so from a very young age, I dreamt of building a company that people would love to work for," she

says. "Business was the discussion at the dinner table. I may not always have understood what they were saying, but it became ingrained in who I am."

Since starting Xavier Creative House (XCH) just seven years ago, Sunny and her team have been building a purpose-driven team for exactly what their clients need. "My credo is based on the belief that bold and evocative solutions come from a chain reaction of positivity, originality, and creativity," she says. "Positivity, creativity, and originality are strong words for me, and when the three are put together, I'm ready to harness that magic."

Since 2017, Sunny and XCH have earned professional and industry accolades for leadership, bold creative, and strategic solutions. "When I developed the positioning for Xavier Creative House, it was really important for me to consider how XCH was going to fit into the healthcare ecosystem, specifically the markets that we service — pharmaceutical, medical device, and biotech," she explains. "The big 'a-ha moment' for me was when I realized that there was a gap we could fill. For our clients, we've become the remedy for brands afflicted by the status quo. We offer bold and evoca-

tive creative solutions paired with meaningful technology. When our clients need to innovate or work on the edges of the box, they know to call us. We believe the demonstration of our values is in our actions. Our ideas have an end game: Execution," Sunny says.

The desire to transform brands is part of Sunny's makeup as well. As a lifelong learner, she never rests on past achievements, and she continues to invest in herself and her teams by engaging in continuous learning. "After going back for my MBA in international marketing, I felt like I was ahead of the curve," she says. "But now, being in healthcare marketing and watching this constant evolution, I realized learning is a continuous process. So, every two years, I register for postgraduate classes/certifications. I studied at Wharton, and now I'm back at St. Joseph's University to build on my MBA with a pharmaceutical marketing post-certificate master's degree. I have found the most value in working side by side with peers in pharma marketing, strategic partners, and sometimes clients. Together we work through impending healthcare challenges to develop creative solutions to the field's most complex issues and drive change. This experience has connected all of the dots because I get to see the industry through their eyes, and it's been amazing."

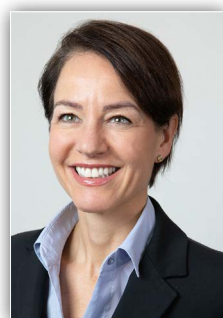
Sunny also lends her talents to help students explore their ambitions in business and as the next generation of leaders. She serves

on Drexel University's Close School of Entrepreneurship External Advisory Board and is a mentor for its Baiada Institute for Entrepreneurship.

As a transformational leader, Sunny pushes her teams to work outside of their comfort zone. "I want them to always seek new sources of inspiration and to empower their mindset," she says. "We have a culture of collaboration and we trust each other."

Sunny loves being an entrepreneur and enjoys the fact that every day is different. "When I wake up in the morning, I embrace what is going to happen," she says. "Entrepreneurs want to solve problems. We analyze things differently; we think with both hemispheres of the brain and explore solutions that other people might say are impossible."

As the agency continues to scale and grow, Sunny welcomes the next set of challenges as part of the evolution. "The startup phase is hard, but then you add on another layer — the need for more people, which brings a new set of challenges," she says. "I'm a process initiator and I embrace every step, and when we level-up, I say, 'Okay, what do we need to do now? I'm ready for the next test, let's solve that challenge, let's go.' When you have the right people on the bus and a team who believes in you and you have faith in them — that's a company. I'm passionate about being a business owner. I'm committed to helping people reach their full potential. This is a wild ride."



Redesigning Medicine

MELANIE NALLICHERI
 President, Chief
 Operating Officer,
 and Co-Founder
 EQRx

Melanie Nallicheri and her co-founders are dedicated to reimagining what medicine can be. After nearly three decades of industry experience, Melanie said enough. She and her cohorts knew there had to be a better way, a world where new medicines come to market faster, a world where new medicines are markers for customer value, and a world where

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people could focus on healing and not on the price tag.

“The drug pricing debate has been going on several years and the reality is that many people struggle to pay for medicines, particularly for life-threatening or chronic diseases,” Melanie says. “There was an acknowledgement amongst the other EQRx co-founders and myself that as an industry, we’re fundamentally failing to fulfill our promise to help people if the medicines we’re making aren’t getting to those who need them.”

Despite all the incredible advances in both science and technological efficiencies, the prices of drugs were not coming down as one would expect with typical market forces. In fact, many times, the prices of drugs were increasing and competitors were entering at the same price point — there was no price competition. “When we really thought about what was possible, we felt strongly that we had to take action,” she says. “We recognized that this trend was unsustainable for patients and healthcare systems, and we understood other forces like regulation would come into play that could create some unintended consequences to innovation and patient access. We knew the time was right to address this issue with a market-based solution, to preserve innovation and infuse competition, based on price, back into the system.”

The team saw an opportunity to build something from the ground up that could leverage efficiencies from the start without

legacy systems, lean on established science to quickly prove the business model, and rethink the drug development process — from development to delivery — to be able to create high-quality medicines and offer them at more affordable prices to improve access for people who need them — and EQRx became a reality in January 2020. Bolstered with \$200 million in Series A financing, EQRx, is a first-of-its-kind biotechnology company focused on re-engineering the process from drug discovery to patient delivery with the goal of offering a market-based solution for the rising cost of medicines. Leveraging advances in science and technology to bring treatments for life-threatening and chronic diseases to people more efficiently and cost-effectively, EQRx intends to offer its therapies at dramatically lower prices compared to today’s innovative medicines.

“To disrupt an industry, you have to be a bit audacious — and that’s how we’ve created our mission and vision,” she says. “We’re intentionally differentiated from anything else you’ll see in our industry. EQRx is remaking medicine, and as a company with a social good mission, we are focused on walking the walk to create a sustainable solution to one of the biggest healthcare issues of our time.”

Obviously launching a company during a pandemic is not optimal, but Melanie says this has only intensified the need for EQRx as a business because of the unprecedented numbers of people unemployed and uninsured as a result. “It’s also accelerated the adoption

of some of the tools and practices that can augment efficiencies, such as telemedicine,” she says. “Hopefully, some of the regulatory actions put in place to support those efforts will be maintained more permanently.”

Another challenge of starting a company at a time when face-to-face interactions are near impossible is building out the team. “We’ve put a specific focus on culture from the start to attract the right people with our mission and vision,” Melanie says. “We are challenging the status quo in drug development and therefore need to challenge ourselves to think outside the box and take risks.

“And frankly, the fact that we could build so quickly has been something,” she continues. “We had every intention to hit the ground running right out of the gate, but the pace at which we’ve been able to scale and meet our goals within the first year has been incredible. EQRx has built a pipeline of investigational medicines, some in late-stage development, specifically in cancer, that could come to market within the next several years, and the team is now more than 100 people.”

The ultimate goal for EQRx is to be a catalyst for change in how drugs are developed and brought to market to address the unsustainably high drug prices for some of the most devastating diseases globally.

“Success is being a market-based solution that incites a sustainable sea change, ultimately in the best interest of patient access,” she says. ^{PV}

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