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Together again: Former Synageva execs return with startup Kiniksa

By Jennifer Boggs, Managing Editor

Last year, Synageva Biopharma Corp. went to Alexion Pharmaceuticals Inc. in one of the year's biggest buyouts – an \$8.4 billion cash and stock deal notable for its whopping 140 percent premium.

With the ink barely dry on that deal, the former execs of the rare disease firm decided they were ready for another round, regrouping to create new startup Kiniksa Pharmaceuticals. (See *BioWorld Today*, May 7, 2015.)

"We just weren't done yet," said Sanj Patel, who created Synageva in 2008. That company would go on to develop Kanuma (sebelipase alfa), which in December became the first FDA-approved therapy to treat patients with lysosomal acid lipase deficiency, an ultra-rare metabolic disorder that leads to multi-organ failure and death. (See *BioWorld Today*, Dec. 9, 2015.)

"When you have that kind of impact on patients, it's kind of addictive," he said. "About 11 of us started with Kiniksa. All of us have the same passion."

Before Synageva, Patel worked at Genzyme Corp., where he held several positions, including heading up the clinical operations team for Fabry disease drug Fabrazyme (agalsidase beta) through its 2003 approval and leading the U.S. launch of Myozyme (alglucosidase alfa) for Pompe disease. He said he views his transitions over the years as "really a continuum," with the goal of building firms to target unmet needs.

Joining him is Chief Operating Officer Steve Mahoney, most recently chief commercial officer at Synageva and, like Patel, a Genzyme alum; Carsten Boess, chief business officer, who had previously served as Synageva's chief financial officer; Chris Heberlig, chief financial officer, who served as senior vice president of finance and business operations at Synageva; Tom Beetham, chief legal officer, who served the same role at Synageva; Chief Scientific Officer (CSO) Gregory Grabowski, a former Genzyme consultant and CSO at Synageva; Rasmus Holm-Jorgensen, chief strategy and portfolio officer, who headed up technical operations at Synageva; Aaron Young, who is reprising his role as head of intellectual property; Eben Tessari, heading business development as he did at Synageva; and Christine Maurer, vice president of program management, who previously oversaw business operations at Synageva. Rounding out the leadership team is Robert Carlson, vice president of research,

whose CV includes stints at Karyopharm Therapeutics Inc., Myriad Genetics Inc. and its spinout Myrexix Inc.

"We brought basically the entire senior level team [from Synageva]," Patel said. "It really does give us a very, very good launching pad."

And in biopharma, leadership is just as important as the pipeline, if not more so, particularly when attracting investors.

Kiniksa has closed a "significant" series A round, Patel said. The firm has not disclosed the amount, nor named the investors, but "they share our long view. We spent a long time thinking about capital allocation."

The company is playing equally close to the vest in terms of specific programs, but Patel told *BioWorld Today* that, while rare disease work is still on the table, Kiniksa would also be "looking pretty broadly."

"It occurred to us there are a number of patients in need . . . adolescents and adults who have these chronic, devastating diseases that are not immediately terminal" but greatly diminish their quality of life, he said.

The aim is to build a "highly sequential pipeline," going from early stage to late stage. "We want to make sure we have a pipeline that can follow on," Patel said. The only requirement is that programs address an "underserved population where patients have unmet needs that we can impact in a big way."

Kiniksa – Patel described the name as an "amalgamation of different things" referring to having a "generational impact" on patients – will look across core therapeutic areas such as autoimmune disease, chronic dermatologic diseases, cardiovascular conditions and other specialty markets.

And the group will take forward lessons learned at Synageva. Successful moves, they will seek to repeat, but "in many ways, we'll do things differently," Patel said. "We'll select the ways that make sense."

With capital in hand, the next steps will be focusing on finding and progressing promising assets. "It's exciting," Patel said. "The band's back together."

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