

## Evelo and Epiva Merge to Become a Leading Immuno-Microbiome Platform Company

7/12/2016 6:36:15 AM



July 12, 2016

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CAMBRIDGE, Mass. – Less than a year after it [exited stealth mode](#), startup **Evelo BioSciences** has found a kindred spirit in another **Flagship Ventures** company, **Epiva Biosciences**. The two companies, both developing microbiome therapies, will combine efforts in a new company to become a leading immuno-microbiome platform company in the U.S.

The two companies, both founded in 2014, have merged under the banner of Evelo Biosciences with a focus on the development of immuno-microbiome therapeutics for cancer, as well as autoimmune and inflammatory diseases. **Simba Gill**, Evelo's chief executive officer, will continue to man the helm of the new entity.

In an exclusive interview with **BioSpace**, Gill said the merger, which he described as a "complementary," was the result of learning the two companies were both on a similar path working in the microbiome. Evelo has been developing therapies for cancer, while Epiva has been focuses on the development of therapies for allergies, inflammatory and autoimmune disorders.

As CEO of Evelo and a senior partner at Flagship Ventures, Gill said he saw how Evelo and Epiva were working on similar therapeutic tracks and they began to explore the ideas of combining their efforts to work on the "dynamics of the immuno-microbiome." Combining forces will allow the new Evelo to "go broader and deeper" with its microbiome therapies in combination with the allergic and auto-immune research and microbiome oncology research already being done at Evelo.

Gill said the company has created the definitive immuno-microbiome therapeutics platform, recognizing that the microbiome and immune system interact to create the immuno-microbiome. The microbiome is the collection of trillions of microbes that live in and on the human body. In recent years, scientists have found that the microbiome plays a crucial role in many areas of human biology and disease. Biological therapy uses natural or artificial substances that mimic or block natural cell responses to kill, control or change the behavior of cancer cells. Evelo has been in the process of developing a next-generation approach to immuno-oncology that goes beyond check-point inhibitors and CAR-T cell therapies.

The new Evelo-Epiva entity will combine the workforce of both companies, creating a new company of about 42 people. Gill said the majority of employees from both companies would remain in the new company, although he did say there were about "two or three" employees who were let go due to redundancies.

The companies come together with about \$40 million in combined finances and the promise of additional funding through Flagship Ventures, Gill said.

The companies have about 50 patents for their intellectual properties and are anticipating moving into the first phases of human testing next year, with more products planned for 2018, Gill added.

"We're moving very quickly," Gill said. "We saw the benefit of combining... and it made tremendous sense." As the two companies merge into one and forge a path forward in microbiome therapies, Gill said he is excited to see the possible benefits their work will have on the health care system and people's lives.

"We're hoping to make a real difference," Gill said. "Whether its allergy, or cancer or autoimmune, we need to get those products in and help the people who need it."

In addition to Evelo and Epiva, Flagship Ventures has launched several biotech and pharmaceutical companies, including Seres Therapeutics, Pronutria BioSciences and ModeRNA Therapeutics.

As Evelo moves forward, Gill said they would be searching for additional space in the Cambridge area, an area that has become a beehive of pharma and biotech innovation.

"We really benefit from being in this area," Gill said.

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With the merger of the two companies, there have been some leadership changes, particularly to the board of directors. **Mark Pruzanski**, co-founder, CEO and president of [Intercept Pharmaceuticals \(ICPT\)](#) and **David Perry**, CEO and president of **Indigo Agriculture**, have joined board chairman **Noubar Afeyan**, Gill and Evelo co-founder **David Berry** on the board of directors. Additions to the executive leadership team include **Jackie Papkoff**, the new senior vice president of research; **Anil Jina**, the new chief medical officer, and **Derek Adams**, senior vice president of commercial development.

"The immune system functions in the context of its interactions with the microbiome and vice versa. Deciphering these interactions presents significant opportunities to develop new medicines for patients across multiple disease areas, including next wave cancer immunotherapy and treatment for autoimmune and inflammatory diseases," Afeyan, who also serves as CEO of Flagship Ventures, said in a statement. "As the microbiome field begins to turn its attention to diseases beyond gut infections, we see the combination of these two first-mover companies as an important strategic development aimed at creating sufficient critical mass to lead the field."

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