

Exclusive: Mt. Everest almost got in the way of a tRNA biotech, but hC Bioscience climbs to Series A extension

by Kyle LaHucik on November 4th, 2022



A Takeda and ARCH-backed startup looking to prove out the next potential RNA goldmine in drug R&D has secured more capital en route to a 2024 clinical entry, CEO Leslie Williams tells *Endpoints News*.

The biotech, hC Bioscience, almost never came to be. Williams was set to climb Mount Everest in 2020. But the Covid-19 pandemic had other plans, so the veteran biotech CEO had time to go full throttle on engaging the lab at the University of Iowa that produced a [2019 paper in *Nature Communications*](#) and then secure the IP, gather feedback from scientists and then form a story to tell investors.

The Everest trip was canceled again in 2021.

Then, in February 2022, hC Bioscience revealed its initial \$24 million Series A, which also included financial support from 8VC.

[With a new startup, ARCH and Takeda wade into growing search for a Swiss Army knife RNA drug](#)
Williams lined up interviews with potential executives to help her steer the ship. In March 2022, she and Luke Timmerman’s crew made it to Nepal and hiked up to the Khumbu Icefall region of Mount Everest. Along the way, she conducted interviews with her soon-to-be C-suite: CTO David Altreuter, CSO Yosef Landesman and chief data science officer Gautam Goel.

The Cambridge, MA-based biotech got more inbound investor interest after the February announcement, so Williams and team asked for due diligence by September. It happened. Taiho Ventures and Panacea Venture joined the cap table, giving hC another \$16 million.

With the new proceeds, the runway goes from 2023 to 2024, around which time the biotech will look to file its first IND for a liver cancer tRNA. The likely delivery route is a lipid nanoparticle, Williams said, so the therapeutic can be delivered systemically. *In vivo* experiments are underway. Local delivery is also being investigated, she added, and beyond cancer, hC eyes genetic diseases.

“What I always say is avoid double jeopardy. [For] a novel drug, don’t do a novel delivery,” Williams said.

hC Bioscience — named after the French term hors catégorie while watching the Tour de France — is attempting to break through in a relatively nascent field that thinks it can treat many diseases, regardless of gene or location of mutation. [Flagship’s Alltrna](#), [Shape Therapeutics](#) and Tevard Biosciences (also out of Christopher Ahern’s lab at Iowa) are all attempting to bind to a stop codon to restore protein function.

[Exclusive: Flagship snags another CEO-partner, on a personal mission, to lead its tRNA boat](#)
The 15-employee startup will move to a new lab early next year, Williams said.

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