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Scipher Medicine Expands Dx Focus to Data-Driven Precision Medicine Development

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NEW YORK – After about a year under new leadership, Scipher Medicine, which developed and markets one of the only molecular assays to aid treatment decisions in rheumatoid arthritis, is making progress in its attempt to advance personalized medicine across a variety of non-oncology disease areas.

Molecular testing in cancer patients has led to the identification of target pathways for a growing class of drugs, as well as a host of biomarkers that can predict which patients will respond to certain therapies.

Scipher CEO Reg Seeto said that he believes other areas of medicine have lagged behind, partly because of a lack of large clinicogenomic datasets that enable such discoveries.

Over the last half year, Scipher has announced a slew of data-sharing agreements — with informatics companies, pharma firms, and others, representing a push to broaden the impact of the hundreds of thousands of transcriptomes is has sequenced as part of its clinical provision of ScipherRA.

"When I joined, the company was a commercial diagnostics company, but over the last six months we've pivoted in a different direction," Seeto said. "We have the world's largest non-oncology clinical transcriptomic data set, but it's not something that we had monetized until recently."

Seeto described the company's evolving strategy as mirroring what firms like Caris Life Sciences or Tempus have been able to achieve in oncology, by leveraging broad omics platforms for clinical testing that can simultaneously serve to drive new biomarker and drug discovery.

"Immunology is still a complete blank space in many ways, and we've spoken to so many companies that want to [do this work], so what we are doing is expanding that opportunity through partnerships," he said.

In its most recent announcement, Scipher said this Monday that it has partnered with health data infrastructure company Savant Bio to build out an advanced clinicogenomic dataset in rheumatoid arthritis that can aid academic research, clinical trial design, therapeutic discovery, and real-world evidence generation.

Savant's platform uses large language models to extract structured variables from free-text documents, such as physician notes and pathology reports, making it easier to explore correlations between patients' health or disease history with their transcriptomes.

Seeto said that other deals have focused on both biomarker discovery for therapy selection and novel drug development.

In June the firm said it had entered a strategic collaboration with an unnamed pharmaceutical company, which is integrating PrismRA into an ongoing trial.

In May, Scipher announced a partnership with InnoSign to identify biomarkers and inform the development of therapeutics for immune-mediated diseases, with an initial focus on rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis, lupus, and inflammatory bowel disease, and a separate focus on studying GLP-1 drugs in the context of metabolic and inflammatory conditions.

Seeto said that the company has already collected some strong data on a predictive signature for GLP-1 treatment efficacy for weight loss, although it remains unpublished.

"We have this transcriptome data asset, but we also have clinical information like [body mass index] … and a full set of other medical history for each patient, so once we've linked that and we're able to analyze these patient journeys we can look through some of the signatures and the responses, and make some of these interesting insights," said Courtney Morris, Scipher's senior VP of business development.

Morris added that the company can also predict, or rank the likelihood that any of these particular drug candidates would be successful. "We have back validated this ability in about 25 specific disease areas … and we know that [if a candidate] ranks in the lower half of the rankings, those clinical trials will fail with nearly 100 percent accuracy."

This has led Scipher to consider taking on therapeutic development itself by in-licensing candidate therapies, deciding whether to progress them based on where they stand in this hierarchy, and then further reducing the risk of failure by moving them forward by using its platform to recruit trial participants most likely to respond.

By mining its molecular data Scipher has also been able to identify novel drug targets. "We have found targets in certain therapeutic areas that we never would have found without applying our data … and we're in discussions with pharma now regarding those top targets," he said.

Scipher received Medicare coverage for PrismRA in 2023, and moved quickly to expand the test from an initial focus on prediction of response to anti-TNF drugs to also include JAK inhibitors and T-cell inhibitors.

Since then, the company has been focused on collecting data on clinical impact, Seeto said. "We've actually doubled T-cell inhibitor usage, [namely Bristol Myers Squibb's Orencia] … and we've actually increased JAK inhibitor usage by about 30 to 40 percent," he added. "Across the board, it seems very powerful in switching behavior."

Scipher's task now is to bring test prices down to enable further market penetration. Seeto said that the firm has been able to drop its costs by about 70 percent with a shift of lab strategy to sequencing exclusively in house. Previously, the company had contracted with Quest for RNA extraction and next-generation sequencing.

Overall, Seeto said that he believes that the immunology space could look much more like oncology in ten years' time in terms of the impact of precision medicine.

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