

**DIVE BRIEF**

ProQR sale of eye drugs comes undone over employment contracts

The Dutch company said its focus will remain on an RNA editing platform called Axiomer.

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Dive Brief:

- ProQR Therapeutics' plan to divest a once-promising eye medicine program faltered after the buyer, Laboratoires Théa, failed to reach employment agreements with key ProQR personnel.
- As one of the conditions of the sale, Théa planned to bring over a number of ophthalmology staff from ProQR. But some of those employees chose not to work for the new company, ProQR said Wednesday. So, Théa terminated the purchase agreement.
- ProQR CEO Daniel de Boer said his company was disappointed the deal fell apart. Still, the focus at ProQR will remain on a number of early-stage RNA editing programs that use the company's "Axiomer" technology, he said.

Dive Insight:

The unraveling of the agreement, which was announced Aug. 1, deprives ProQR of immediate cash as well as possible future

payments. In addition to potential royalties if the drugs reached the market, Théa had agreed to an initial payment of 12.5 million euros, or about \$13.2 million, plus as much as 135 million euros if certain developmental, regulatory and commercial goals were met.

ProQR initially had high hopes for entering the ophthalmology business and advanced two drugs called sepfarsen and ultevursen past early-stage research. But sepfarsen failed in a late-stage clinical trial in February 2022, sending shares tumbling.

The company at first made plans to shed staff and overhaul research as it tried to find a way forward for sepfarsen while developing ultevursen. But by August 2022, ProQR said it would seek a partner for its eye drugs and focus instead on the Axiomer RNA editing platform.

While the Axiomer program remains in early stages, ProQR does have a heavyweight partner in Eli Lilly for that research. In December, Lilly agreed to pay ProQR \$75 million and make an equity investment to expand a development deal originally reached in 2021.