



# Biogen, continuing executive revamp, finds a new research head

Jane Grogan, an industry veteran who worked at Genentech for over 15 years, will take over the role starting Oct. 2.

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*Permission granted by Biogen*

Biogen has hired a new head of research, announcing Wednesday an appointment that the biotechnology company believes will help expand its work beyond the field of neuroscience.

On Oct. 2, Jane Grogan will officially take over the position, which has been without a permanent appointee for nearly two years. Grogan recently served as chief scientific officer at Graphite Bio, a cell and gene therapy developer, and as a scientific advisory board member for Bicycle Therapeutics, a synthetic biology company. She also spent more than 15 years as a scientist at Genentech, where she led research programs directed at cancer and disorders tied to the immune system.

That experience proved attractive to Biogen leaders, who have said they want to diversify research efforts that, for much of the company's history, have focused on diseases of the brain and central nervous system.

While a handful of those programs resulted in marketed products — two new medicines for Alzheimer’s disease in two years, for example — many more have failed, leading some on Wall Street to classify Biogen’s pipeline as “high risk, high reward.”

“Having a few of those projects in our pipeline is good,” said Christopher Viehbacher, the former Sanofi CEO who took on the top spot at Biogen last November, during an earnings call in February. But “having 100% ... is challenging.”

In just the past year or so, Biogen has stopped developing at least seven experimental drugs that collectively targeted a variety of illnesses, from Alzheimer’s to stroke to ALS. The company also exited research into eye diseases, and claims it’s been “refocusing” investments in gene therapy.

Biogen leadership has said that, as part of the research overhaul, there will be greater investment in the areas of immunology, neuropsychiatry and rare disease. To that end, in July the company announced the biggest deal in its history by unadjusted dollar terms: a planned \$7.3 billion acquisition of rare disease drugmaker Reata Pharmaceuticals.

Viehbacher led Sanofi through the French pharmaceutical giant’s \$20 billion purchase of Genzyme. And in his short time at Biogen, he has expressed interest in dealmaking.

Still, Viehbacher has said the “number one goal is to return Biogen to sustainable growth,” which has brought significant cost-cutting measures internally. Just days before the Reata announcement, Biogen disclosed plans to eliminate 1,000 jobs as part of an initiative meant to save \$1 billion in annual operating expenses.

The company, having seen sales decline on its top products, ended 2022 with total revenue down roughly 7%, to \$10.2 billion. Biogen’s total expenses have fallen as well. Research and

development costs, for instance, went from almost \$4 billion in 2020 to \$2.5 billion in 2021 and just over \$2.2 billion last year.

Priya Singhal, Biogen's head of development who has been serving as interim head of research, told investors in April that the company is "looking at every program in great depth, several times over, and thinking about what are the options, what are the operational and strategic and regulatory challenges, but also the opportunities."

Soon, Grogan will have substantial influence over what research programs Biogen funds.

"Grogan is a pioneering scientist whose groundbreaking discoveries at Genentech helped pave the way for development of targeted autoimmune and oncology therapies," Viehbacher said in a statement. "I believe Jane will be a strong asset to Biogen as we seek to bring a greater number of innovative medicines to market faster and more effectively."

Grogan is the latest addition to a Biogen executive team that has transformed over the last several years. In late 2019, Michael Ehlers, the company's former research and development head, left to join the life sciences venture capital firm Apple Tree Partners. His duties were passed to Chief Medical Officer Alfred Sandrock; but Sandrock departed by the end of 2021.

Biogen leadership then tapped Singhal, who at the time was the company's head of global safety and regulatory sciences, to act as interim head of research and development until a permanent replacement was found. In January of 2023, Biogen announced it would split the role between two executives, with Singhal becoming head of development.

The shake-ups weren't just on the research side, either. Biogen appointed a new chief financial officer, Michael McDonnell, in

2020, and a head of corporate development, Adam Keeney, this past April. Its board also recently changed with the controversial election of one new member and the departure of three others who chose not to run for re-election.

Some analysts argue that Biogen was hindered in its ability to pursue business development because of board in-fighting. The recent board and executive team changes may suggest the company is becoming more harmonious, analysts have speculated.