

In 2013, Guardant had plans for an innovative liquid biopsy to help oncologists guide late-stage cancer treatments. But what really impressed Sequoia was AmirAli and Helmy's unsentimental, carefully designed strategy to reach their end goal—a simple blood test for the early detection of cancer that would revolutionize its treatment.

Helmy, AmirAli, and Aaref recall the early days of their partnership.

Aaref Hilaly

Sequoia

At the time, many investors were wary of companies that were somewhere between healthcare, life sciences, and computing. But we believe it's around the seams and edges that new markets form.

Helmy Eltoukhy

Co-Founder, Guardant Health

We had just raised a seed round when we first started talking with Sequoia, so we weren't looking for investment. But we saw they were thinking about the market the same way, and we kept the conversation going. It was about a six-month courtship.

AmirAli Talasaz

Co-Founder, Guardant Health

We had invested in clinical trials early on, which is unusual. They can be risky because, if the trial falls apart, it endangers the company. But we wanted to know as soon as possible if it wasn't going to have the benefit we hoped for. Luckily, the trials were successful, which was a huge factor in securing insurance coverage.

Aaref

There are many dreamers who say, “I want to cure cancer.” AmirAli and Helmy were clear-eyed about the challenges they faced and each step they’d need to take to reach their goal. They started with late-stage patients, now they’re moving on to recurrence detection in cancer survivors, and they plan on using data from both of those groups to develop tests for the early detection of cancer in higher risk individuals.

Helmy

When we partnered, we were absolute newbies in terms of PR. Sequoia’s comms lead arranged meetings for us with TechCrunch, Recode, and The New York Times, then spent days helping us strategize what to say. We got coverage from almost everyone we pitched.

AmirAli

Putting the product in the market when it was so new was a risk. But once the word got out, doctors started using the test and they saw the benefit. Today, our approach has been adopted, not just in the U.S., but in other various regions around the world, by clinicians who are treating patients, and by biopharmaceutical companies that are using our tests for translational science research and identifying patient populations to accelerate clinical trial enrollment, drug development and commercialization post-drug approval.

Aaref

Guardant has the world’s market-leading comprehensive liquid biopsy test, but that’s just the beginning of a journey that will take years. To refine it for early-stage detection of cancer, they need to test lots of patients and gather lots of data.

Helmy

We believe that if we can test hundreds of thousands of patients, that will give us a fighting chance of defining cancer specifically enough to overcome the gaps in current technology for early detection.

AmirAli

Early detection is the ultimate goal, but the short-term deliverables are also a powerful motivator. We start our company meetings with stories of patients who have received better treatment because their oncologists have used our tests.

Helmy

I think we're in the middle of a revolution from hypothesis-driven, reactive medicine to data-driven, proactive care. We see a future where many cancers can be detected perhaps even before they're actually cancer. That's exciting.

Through June 2018, Guardant's liquid biopsy has been used more than 70,000 times to help inform which therapy may be effective for advanced stage cancer patients with solid tumors.

Guardant Health

Developing
technology that
aims to transform
cancer to a
preventable and
manageable
disease.

Milestones

Founded 2012

Partnered 2013

Team

Helmy Eltoukhy

AmirAli H. Talasaz

Michael Wiley

Partner

Aaref Hilaly