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Phoenix diagnostics company CND Life Sciences raises \$2.4 million in seed funding

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CND Life Sciences, a medical diagnostic testing company based in Phoenix, has raised \$2.4 million in seed funding.

CND produces a diagnostic test kit, called Syn-One, that looks for abnormal proteins which can indicate the presence of neurodegenerative diseases such as dementia with Lewy bodies, REM sleep behavior disorder and Parkinson's disease.

The company was founded in 2017 by three doctors, two of which are professors at Harvard Medical School and the third, Todd Levine, is director of neurology at [HonorHealth](#) in Phoenix and chief medical officer at CND.

This funding came from a pool of 15 investors led by CND's chairman Peter Harris with participation from HonorHealth.



KARINA SOLIS

CND Life Sciences tests samples of its Syn-One test at the company's lab in Phoenix.

Todd LaPorte, HonorHealth's CEO, said CND's test is playing an important role in the field.

"HonorHealth recognizes the importance of world-class technology to advance the care of our patients, and our support for the work of CND Life Sciences reflects this commitment to those we care for," LaPorte said in a statement. "Diagnosing and treating neurodegenerative diseases with novel, evidence-based tools is a priority for HonorHealth. CND is playing an important role to advance the science of diagnostic testing in this field."

Rick Morello, CND's CEO, joined the company full time in April 2020 after working with its founders as a strategic advisor in the company's early days. Morello said working with such clever people on this clear market opportunity drew him in.

"That combination of large unmet need, great science, really engaging founders who are both scientists and practicing physicians, that combination of things really drew me from being an informal advisor to jumping in and being full time CEO a year ago," he said.

Morello said the company has 15 employees now, but expects to have 25 by the end of the year. It currently operates a lab in Phoenix where the diagnostic kits are tested, and the office staff are set up at Industrious offices in Scottsdale.

Part of this seed funding will go toward the creation of a new headquarters for CND, with offices and labs in a single location, set to open up in early 2022.

How it works

The Syn-One test is used to detect, visualize, and quantify the presence of abnormal, phosphorylated alpha-synuclein in cutaneous nerve fibers. Simply put, it helps doctors find abnormal proteins which can build up in nerve endings and impair how the central nervous system works.

The test is done in a physician's office by applying local

anesthetic and taking three skin samples which are about 3mm wide and 5mm deep. These 'punch skin biopsies' are small enough that patients do not require stitches afterwards.

The whole process is done in about 15 minutes, and results are returned in a few weeks after the team in Phoenix tests the samples.

Finding these abnormal synuclein (pronounced sin-NEW-lee-in) can be done in other ways, but they tend to be more burdensome than the Syn-One. Spinal taps are invasive while blood testing and imaging tests are less reliable in this instance.

"That's a big part of the innovation is just making something very accessible for a patient," Morello said. "The nurse or the physician themselves can do it. And again it doesn't require more extensive imaging or something more invasive."

While there still aren't full cures for neurodegenerative diseases such as Parkinson's, finding these abnormal proteins is key for helping doctors decide what to look for next. If there are abnormal proteins built up then doctors can start looking for more discrete neurodegenerative diseases.

Currently the test is binary, reporting if there is abnormal synuclein or not. But there are hopes that the test will be able to distinguish between different types of synucleinopathies which manifest as different diseases.

CND won a \$2.4 million grant from the National Institutes of Health last year to work on this. It is currently running a 500-patient clinical study to validate the sensitivity of the Syn-One test on detecting these different synucleinopathies.

Seeding growth

Morello said the company had been gaining traction with minimal investment in sales and marketing, but that will change with the injection of funds from the seed round.

Over the next 12 to 15 months, CND will bulk up its

commercialization work and it recently hired several regional sales staff to increase adoption of the tests nationwide. Syn-One is currently available in all states except New York, where there are some additional regulatory steps before the test hits the market.

CND will also use the funding to expand the lab team, which recently welcomed a senior pathology director in Phoenix. The money will support the development of the new headquarters and lab space later this year.

Morello said that these diagnostic tests need to be top-notch, so they can better inform doctors once therapies for neurodegenerative diseases come out.

“The earlier we can detect reliably, the better chance that the patients and families have the ability to create a plan,” he said. “In the next five and 10 years, as innovation catches up on the therapeutic side, the diagnostic side has to be there as well and that's why we're excited to kind of get a jump on that with a technology that can start to detect even earlier to inform potential steps in the pathway to treat the disease.”

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