

Strategic Partnerships: Driving innovation through collaboration – Cancer Research Horizons

Josh Elliott, Baringa:

Hello, listeners, and welcome to this podcast brought to you by Baringa's Pharmaceutical and Life Sciences team. I'm Josh Elliott, a Pharma and Life Sciences leader at Baringa, and I'm excited to be joined today by Beatrice Lana, Strategic Alliance executive from Cancer Research Horizons. Today, we'll be discussing a broad yet increasingly vital topic, the role of life science organisations in strategically partnering across the healthcare ecosystem. We'll explore how strong collaboration drives innovation and accelerates development, ultimately bringing transformative therapies to patients. We hope you enjoy the podcast. And if you'd like to hear more from our team, then feel free to access our articles, case studies, podcasts and events through the links provided.

So, Beatrice, I've been lucky to have the opportunity to meet you a few times over the past two years, and I've really valued the conversations we've had around the evolving role of strategic partnerships in the life sciences and wider healthcare ecosystem. Before we dive into the topic in more depth, I would love for you to share a bit about your background and the work you're doing at Cancer Research Horizons.

Beatrice Lana, Cancer Research Horizons:

Sure. Hi, Josh. Really happy to be joining you today. So, I work with Cancer Research Horizon, the innovation arm of Cancer Research UK, which is the world largest independent funder of cancer research and innovation. It's a charity dedicated to saving lives through research. Our mission is to prevent, control, and cure cancer through our groundbreaking research. Cancer Research Horizon purpose and mission are to translate the cutting-edge cancer research that we fund into bold new treatment that change lives. We bridge gap between academia and industry, uniting scientists, startups, and global pharma, to accelerate the discovery from the lab into the clinical trials and ultimately to the patient.

I have been working at Cancer Research Horizon for seven year now as a Strategic Alliance executive and the pleasure to manage some of the most exciting strategic alliances in Cancer Research Horizon portfolio. Currently managing the Cancer Research Horizon and AstraZeneca Functional Genomics Centre alliance, in the past on extremely successful and interesting alliance with iOnctura, and most recently a launch at Cancer Research Horizon, a partnership with Diamond Light Source. And at Cancer Research Horizon, really, our mission is rooted in collaboration. We believe that no single organisation can solve cancer alone. By strategically partnering across the life science and healthcare ecosystem, we really unlock and maximise innovation. We share resources, we push boundaries to make transformative therapies possible.

Josh Elliott, Baringa:

Great. Thanks, Beatrice. It's great to hear about the impactful work you're doing and how CRH partners across that ecosystem. It really brings to life how complex yet impactful those collaborations can be. From your experience, what are some of the biggest challenges or barriers you faced in partnering effectively? And despite those challenges, what are the benefits that can be delivered through effective partnering?

Beatrice Lana, Cancer Research Horizons:

Partnering across the life science and healthcare ecosystem, I feel like it's like directing an orchestra. And you guide multiple stakeholders so that the team or the orchestra really come together as a

symphony and produce something beautiful. But of course, there are challenges everywhere. It's very difficult. But it's nothing that I think cannot be managed or really used with the right alliance management best practice and tools. Often what I come across is challenges around cultural or operational misalignment. So, if the partner operates differently, whether for decision-making, or speed, or risk appetite, or organisational culture, that can be challenging, because you're coming from different point of view. So, because we are partnered with industry, with academia, with other not-for-profit organisation, it means balancing very diverse perspective and requirement and expectation and sometimes even language.

We use what is called the 3D-fit model. That is a tool that assess strategic fit, cultural and operational fit. With that, we can identify potential gaps and how we address those gaps. And really, if we keep the communication open and as long as there is a shared value, those difference can actually become strength. So, yes, this is a challenge but can definitely be managed and even used in your favour. But sometimes priority shift or certain project or programmes are underdelivered, and then there is misalignment on goals. And if you don't deal, manage well the situation, it can lead to decrease in trust. For example, one of the most common challenges that I face in forming effective partnership is when research move at different pace than industry. So you need to be able to connect the partner and making each one understand why we need to work under different timeline, different policies.

And in fact, communication breakdown is, I would say, the third example I can give as a challenge. So, when there is lack of clarity around role, responsibility, expectation, this can really derail the partnership, the initiative. So, being able to reengage with a partner, communicate well your position, and really have active listening, that's really important to reengage and realign and make sure that the partnership start work again. Is it worth it? Yes, it is worth it. There are really great, immense benefits. For instance, the impact is amplified if the partnership is managed well and is a strategic partnership, if there is a mission that the stakeholder believes in. And I think this is very true for Cancer Research Horizon. We want to bring breakthrough for cancer therapies to patient. We select partners to move faster and push boundaries. So, we create together solution that none of the partner could have achieved alone.

And really, by working collaboratively, the organisation can pool resources, infrastructure, capabilities, and each partner can give access to broader expertise, knowledge, and network. And I think this is actually a very strong point for Cancer Research Horizon and Cancer Research UK. We can give access to a large UK and international network of CRUK-funded research. So these brilliant, amazing mind that, honestly, it's a pleasure to work with. They are inspiring.

Also, think very important is that when you partner, you have greater ownership and commitment from both partners, especially if you partner earlier on, which is what we like to do. So, if partners are engaged since the beginning, they help shape the asset development, the desirable outcomes. They feel empowered and they share responsibility. And this is lead to stronger alignment, faster decision-making, and probably higher probability of success. So, yeah, ultimately, when done well, partnership can really accelerate innovation and bring these transformative therapies into patient much faster. And that's what can be inspired every day.

Josh Elliott, Baringa:

Thanks, Beatrice. It definitely feels like a very complex symphony to manage, but a really important one. And as you say, the patient impact it can have is amazing. It'll be really good to dig into a couple of, I guess, specific challenge or focus areas that I've certainly seen in a strategic partnership setting and get your view on those as well. One of the conversations we regularly have with our clients is, we almost expect everyone to be able to go and operate in that partnering space with their existing skill sets when

it might require people to be more collaborative, think more strategically, join more dots, potentially leverage more commercial skills. So, what I'll be really keen to understand from you is, what kind of skills, behaviours, capabilities do you think need to be built into an organisation to effectively partner externally? Similarly, it'll be great to know, do you have any success stories or, indeed, war stories to share on that front?

Beatrice Lana, Cancer Research Horizons:

I think that wanting to collaborate is fundamental, but it cannot be improvised, and it only works if the organisation is built and structured to partner properly. Otherwise, the partnering model will fall apart no matter how good the idea of the partnership was. Alliance management is a specialised discipline, and it requires mastering a combination of skills, and which include stakeholder management and engagement, leadership and long-term strategic planning, managing multiple programmes at once, and especially identifying as early as possible risk and how to mitigate them, and really having that short- and long-term vision. And you need to be in an organisation that gives you, alliance manager, the time to do alliance management, to focus on alliance management and actually put into practice those skills. And you need an organisation that invests in hiring, training individuals to get those skills. So, we look for individuals specifically for us that can bridge the gap between science and business, for example. This is another important skill. So, it's something that needs to grow within the organisation.

And I guess another important thing for the organisation is, that the organisation needs to have is the ability to balance flexibility and discipline, or those more rigid policies. And we work for a charity, so obviously, we need to have really strong policy in practice, and we need to adhere sometimes to very strict procedures. And we were in a situation where we struggled with certain partners that they could understand that, and because we take sometimes longer than a fast-growing biotech or a startup. So, yes, that, for example, is a story I can bring. We were working with actually a couple of biotech and startup. And the problem was needing to adapt to each other's way of working. And obviously, they are very agile. They were quick. We needed to take a little bit the longer route for decision-making process. So, when you understand each other, that's when you really can fix things.

But think the key, the ability is to be able to be professional yet agile and to be customer-oriented to target the support. So, at Cancer Research Horizon, we always try to target our support in the collaboration to the partner we are collaborating with. And I think iOnctura is a really success story. It's a partnership we have with this fast-growing biotech and very different pace. And now we're partnering for them for years now, and we have assets into the clinic. And it's a really good example how two very committed partners, they adapt to each other a bit operationally to really achieve something great.

Josh Elliott, Baringa:

Great. Thanks, Beatrice. I think a real key takeaway there is the adaptability and the diverse nature of partners you collaborate with and operate with across this space. I guess, with that diverse set of partners, and I think you've already mentioned it, it can be challenging to create alignment in vision, goals, and incentives. Obviously, the motivations of a biotech would be quite different to an academic organisation, different to a startup. So, from your experience, how do you go around creating alignment in vision, in goals, in incentives when there are diverse partners with diverse motivations, I guess? And what can happen if that alignment breaks down?

Beatrice Lana, Cancer Research Horizons:

So, alignment definitely is key. And that's why it's so important to invest enough time and resources in that critical initial phase of launch or relaunch of an alliance. Because especially when you partner with

an organisation that has a different type of operational culture, behaviours, alignment doesn't happen. It just has to be built. So, what we do, for example, is a strong launch. So, define a shared vision and mission very clearly, set clear objectives, establish quantifiable, ideally, success criteria so that it's clear for every stakeholders where we are going and why we are doing things. And when you start working together, just have a lunch, a meeting where you all meet in person, ideally, to reiterate these things that you probably have said already during the due diligence. And then provide clear and engaging information to support alignment. So, you can use best practice alliance management tools, like an alliance charter, to help communicate the partner goals and operating principle and then motivate. That is important. It's really important as well, as much as alignment.

So, as you mentioned, partner, different partners might be driven by different things and needs. So, it is very important that the alliance manager is good at helping, highlighting, and reminding the different stakeholders why the partnership is important for them. And it is important that you understand who you're talking to, who is the stakeholder, because the value for these people is very different. As an alliance manager, you need to tailor your communication and the value proposition to fit the person, the stakeholder you're interacting to. And there are, again, tools you can use, like alliance health check, risk register, postmortem exercise. And we have an example of a partner we've been working with for many years, and situation and needs change. So we needed to reevaluate where we are. And rather than terminating the alliance, we re-transformed the alliance. So we realigned, revisit the shared goals, and essentially relaunch the collaboration with fresh energy and clarity and willingness to adapt. And that ended up in a very successful partnership, actually.

Josh Elliott, Baringa:

Thanks, Beatrice. That's really sage advice. And the part that really resonated with me was around motivating by meeting people where they are. I think definitely I've seen that a partnership contract is signed or the commercial deal of a partnership is announced, and that's almost used as the key messaging for the workforce. But actually being able to translate that into what it means for the individual and the benefit it's going to bring the patient, et cetera, beyond the deal terms and getting really specific around that for the scientists, the business stakeholders involved in that alliance. Really great to cover that topic.

One area we haven't covered yet, and I'll be really keen to get your view on, is the considerations to take when managing a one-to-many partnership versus a one-to-one partnership. You might have quite a clean partnering arrangement where CRH, as you described, are kind of partnering with AstraZeneca around a kind of clear goal. But these consortia can also multiply and grow quite quickly, right?

Beatrice Lana, Cancer Research Horizons:

Yeah.

Josh Elliott, Baringa:

And I've also been involved in collaborations where there might be 30 different parties, and that might be public bodies, private bodies, academia, industry. And I think surfacing all the assumptions and differences early, ideally during due diligence and contracting, rather than discovering them later on is a really key focus there. But I'm really keen to get your understanding of what are the nuances and key considerations you see when it comes to one-to-many versus one-to-one partnering.

Beatrice Lana, Cancer Research Horizons:

Yeah, absolutely. It becomes incredibly more complicated when you manage multiple stakeholder like in a consortia than in a one-to-one partnership. So, I guess, the consideration I've learned as alliance manager at Cancer Research Horizon when I'm having a situation where I have to manage different multiple partners at the same time is that the coordination become more intricate. So it's on the practical day-to-day side of things. So data sharing, governance models, communication style. With each pattern, essentially, they might bring a different perspective. So, you need to coordinate different people, which require more time. And even the decision-making process becomes longer, and you need to prepare for that. So you need to anticipate and count for that additional time that you need. You need to be even better at try to influence the decision to guide, to try to achieve a sort of middle ground that everybody is happy with.

One thing that I think is key is to have the right people in the room. Again, the governance become really complicated, and it is essential to obtain clear direction. And you need the people that are empowered to make decision in the room, because otherwise updates or decision has to travel multiple layers before reaching someone with authorities. So, ultimately, yes, it is possible and it's great, but you just have to design even a stronger partnership model intentionally with the end in mind. So anticipate all the challenging, understand really well the operational aspect and the governance, the time required, who are the decision-making stakeholders, and make sure that processes are reflected correctly in the alliance agreement.

Josh Elliott, Baringa:

Great. Thanks for providing those pointers, Beatrice. It's been really great exploring these wide range of topics with you and hearing about the work and success stories at CRH. With all of that in mind, it'll be great to know what excites you most about the future of CRH and its strategic partnering capabilities. Where do you see the biggest opportunities for innovation and impact over the next few years?

Beatrice Lana, Cancer Research Horizons:

Yeah, definitely. What excites me most is that there is always some interesting opportunities coming up. There is always some opportunities to do more. We have not done beating cancer yet. And it's very exciting that at the moment, really, we are shifting toward a more future-proof and agile type of alliances, which will be capability-driven partnership, and also more creative approaches to rare cancer. So, historically, Cancer Research Horizon, we have done a lot of what we call pre-partnering. So, alliances focus on developing early-stage drug-discovery assets. But over the next few years, we want to evolve. For example, we will be increasingly focused on partnership with platform and technology-accelerating partners. So we want partners that can bring in new capabilities, infrastructure and resources that can help us develop our assets more effectively. And I mentioned already the Functional Genomics Centre alliance. And most recently, we launched the Diamond Light Source alliance, which is a great example where we bring capability and infrastructure together to achieve the development of project faster and treatment faster.

And then this big opportunity for innovation in rare cancer. We already working on rare cancer, but we will be focusing more in even more innovative project in this space. It's a bold move that reflects a big unmet need and also our ambition to be part of a creative, impact-driven solution.

And then, we'll continue working this collaboration and clinical operation area. So we are forging exciting alliances with other charities, like the Dutch and Norwegian Cancer Societies, to run clinical trials in Europe for rare indication. And the idea is that each partner pools in resources from their own country to really progress your treatment to the clinic and to the patient. And essentially, really, at the heart of what we do is building the very best programmes to beat cancer. So we are investing in

developing the stronger teams. It's science, it's alliance management, but it's our calling in the business development, in the legal team and the operation team, which are all essential to help us doing what we are doing. And we believe that this model of staying agile and amplifying impact ultimately will get the life-changing therapy to patients faster, which is Cancer Research Horizon real goal.

Josh Elliott, Baringa:

Thanks, Beatrice. It's amazing to hear about where CRH is going. And particularly that collaboration, the ClinOps space, with the Dutch and Norwegian Cancer Societies and that kind of broader global impact that CRH are driving sounds really, really exciting. It's been a pleasure speaking to you today. And if our listeners would like to delve into this further, then please feel free to access our articles, our case studies, our podcasts through the links provided. But finally, a big thank you, Beatrice. I've really enjoyed the discussion today. And look forward to hearing about how your alliances develop going forward.

Beatrice Lana, Cancer Research Horizons:

Of course. Thank you so much for having me. Strategic partner isn't always easy, but when done well, it's really give the power to transform science into lifesaving treatment. And that's really what drive us at Cancer Research Horizon. And I think one thing I've noticed that it's amazing what happens when people stop competing and really start collaborating as suddenly progress becomes possible. So, thank you so much for the opportunity.

Josh Elliott, Baringa:

Thank you.