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Backed By Key Investors, Kala Pharmaceuticals Taps Its First CEO

By Paul Bonanos / [Email the Author](#) / ["The Pink Sheet" DAILY Jul. 12, 2012](#)

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Executive Summary

As it develops therapies that target mucosal tissues, the seed-stage start-up hires Sanofi-Pasteur veteran Guillaume Pfefer in advance of a Series A round of funding.

Young startup [Kala Pharmaceuticals Inc.](#), a drug discovery company aiming to address diseases affecting mucosal tissues, has hired a Big Pharma veteran as its first official chief executive.

Kala said July 12 that former [Sanofi Pasteur](#) executive Guillaume Pfefer will lead the start-up, which has won the support of venture firms Third Rock Ventures, Polaris Venture Partners, Lux Capital and Lighthouse Capital. Pfefer will replace Lux co-founder and managing partner Robert Paull, who had been acting CEO of Kala.

Pfefer held multiple titles at Sanofi-Pasteur, the vaccines division of [Sanofi](#). Most recently, he was general manager of Sanofi-Pasteur Mexico from late 2009 until June 2012. Previously, he had been vice president and global head of its influenza and pneumococcal franchise during 2008 and 2009, during the global outbreak of H1N1 virus. Prior to that, he was Sanofi-Pasteur's global head of corporate strategy. Pfefer's resume also includes stints at [Aventis SA](#) and [Rhone-Poulenc Rorer Pharmaceuticals Inc.](#)

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Pfefer arrives at a start-up barely out of infancy. Kala emerged from stealth mode in March 2012, when it revealed a \$6.2 million tranche of an \$11.2 million seed round of funding. Kala raised an initial \$2 million in December 2009, then \$3 million more in November 2010, according to documents filed with the Securities & Exchange Commission.

It is Pfefer's first time at a start-up company. "Somehow I showed up on the map," he said of the company's set of candidates. "I had been looking to get back to the US, and I was intrigued and excited to learn about their technology."

Drugs That Stay In Mucosal Tissues

The Waltham, Mass.-based company wants to develop drugs to treat diseases related to mucosal tissues, including those found in the eyes, lungs, gastrointestinal tract and female reproductive system. It will use a nanotech platform that can deliver drugs in a fashion that permeates and coats mucosa. Kala believes that its products, which it calls Mucosal Penetrating Products or MPPs, can cross the barriers that keep drugs from reaching tissues. Kala has previously named cystic fibrosis and ulcerative colitis as areas of interest.

Pfefer said the process could yield drugs that pass through mucosal barriers, coat tissues uniformly, and remain there for some time. That could lead to lower-dosage versions of existing drugs, since the substances can reach the appropriate tissues and sustain release over time rather than dispersing quickly.

Concurrently with the CEO appointment, Kala also announced the publication of a paper concerning a promising treatment for Herpes Simplex Virus-2 infection. In the June 13 issue of *Science Translational Medicine*, researchers revealed results of a mouse study of Kala's acyclovir-MPP, a re-engineered version of a commonly used antiviral. According to the company, its version of the drug shows potential as a once-daily treatment that could prove effective at one-tenth the dosage of conventional acyclovir therapy.

Pfefer said further details about its projects will be revealed in coming months. Additional candidates could include new versions of well-known compounds such as the acyclovir drug, but he said Kala is also open to developing new drugs using its platform, possibly through partnerships with existing pharma. He declined to say which of its in-house drug programs is likely to yield the first clinical candidate, or to discuss which is farthest along.

Ultimately, Kala expects to concentrate its efforts around a few products, although it will continue to build a pipeline of candidates from its platform. Pfefer would not discuss its longer-term partnership strategy.

Kala is likely to raise a formal Series A round of funding in late 2012 or early 2013, Pfefer said. The round may or may not include another investor beyond its existing syndicate, although a new round leader could provide "expertise and validation," he said.

Pfefer also took a seat on Kala's seven-member board of directors. He sits alongside three scientific co-founders and representatives from Third Rock, Lux and Polaris.

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