



## Biotech Entrepreneur Chris Varma Scores \$67 Million for Frontier Medicines

*After co-founding Blueprint Medicines, Varma starts new cancer drug developer*

By Brian Gormley  
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Venture capitalists are once again betting on the biotechnology expertise of entrepreneur Chris Varma, providing \$67 million to back his latest startup, Frontier Medicines Corp.

Dr. Varma previously co-founded and led Blueprint Medicines Corp., a developer of drugs for cancer and rare diseases that went public in 2015 and now has a market capitalization of about \$4.5 billion.

Deerfield Management, Droia Oncology Ventures and MPM Capital are leading this Series A round for South San Francisco, Calif.-based Frontier. DCVC Bio and RA Capital Management also joined the financing.



Blueprint has succeeded by developing medicines that block kinase enzymes, a well-established target for drugmakers.

Frontier's approach is different than that of Blueprint. The company, which was co-founded by Dr. Varma, Daniel Nomura, an associate professor at University of California at Berkeley, and UC Berkeley Assistant Professor Roberto Zoncu, says its technology could enable it to develop medicines aimed at the 90% of proteins in the body that pharmaceutical companies haven't been able to target with drugs. This could lead to new treatments for cancer and other diseases.

The 10% of proteins that have been accessible to drugmakers are like coat hangers, Dr. Varma said, in that they have corners where a chemical compound can dock. The remaining 90% are like strings with flat surfaces and nowhere for a drug to attach.

But when proteins move, they create temporary binding pockets, he said. Frontier has identified these pockets and has a library of chemical compounds it can use to search for drugs that bind to them.

Venture firms recently have funded other startups seeking to expand the universe of protein targets for drug development. They include Relay Therapeutics Inc., which secured \$400 million in December through a financing led by SoftBank Vision Fund.

Frontier's lead drug, a cancer treatment, has yet to enter clinical trials. The company hasn't revealed specifics about this compound yet, but the drug is aimed at a protein that has long been considered to be undruggable, or impossible to bind with a drug, according to Dr. Varma.

With this financing, Frontier plans to invest in research and development and to build its team and pipeline of drug treatments.