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Antiva Biosciences CEO draws on personal experience to fuel drug development (Video)

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A quick glance around Gail Maderis' office at Antiva Biosciences Inc. pulls in multiple awards, tiny glass sculptures near the outside window and framed photos lining the shelf behind her desk. Lots of photos.

There's one with her flanked by former Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton — yes, in the same photo — and another of her with former Vice President Al Gore. And there's one with the team she led at BayBio.

There's also a photo of the late Henri Termeer, Maderis' mentor and former boss at Genzyme Corp., where she was the founder and president of Genzyme Molecular Oncology.

The message is clear: Gail Maderis values people.

Don't take that the wrong way, friends and colleagues say — Maderis is no pushover. From her time at Genzyme to her move to the West Coast 15 years ago to become president and CEO of Five Prime Therapeutics Inc., and from stepping in to lead the biotech trade group BayBio to coming out of a short-lived retirement to lead Antiva, they say, Maderis cares about her coworkers, but she knows how to shape and lead people to get results.

"It's never about her," said Paul Hastings, who got to know Maderis when he headed Genzyme's European group and she led the cancer business.



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Gail Maderis, CEO of Antiva Biosciences.

Gail Maderis

President and CEO, Antiva Biosciences Inc.

HQ: South San Francisco

What it does: While two early-stage clinical trials test the safety and efficacy of its lead experimental drug, called ABI-1968, Antiva this summer raised \$15 million, bringing its fundraising total to more than \$56 million.

Philanthropy: Gail Maderis supports the causes of STEM education and global health; mentors life science entrepreneurs; and serves as a trustee of the UC Berkeley Foundation.

Later, after both moved to the the Bay Area, Maderis and Hastings were in line to chair BayBio at a time when the trade group was in need of strong leadership.

“I proposed to her, ‘I will only be chair of BayBio if you agree to be interim CEO,’ and it became a partnership that lasted many years,” said Hastings, who with Maderis guided the organization through its 2015 merger with the California Healthcare Institute to form the California Life Sciences Association.

With the merger completed, Maderis, who has managed multiple sclerosis since she was diagnosed 13 years ago, decided to take a well-deserved retirement. It didn’t last long.

Antiva leaders saw someone who knows how to cultivate talent. “Gail’s combination of grit, business savvy and vision is ideal for an early-stage biotech company,” said Wende Hutton, a general partner with Canaan Partners, which three years ago co-led Antiva’s first institutional fundraising round. “She has led successful clinical trials, raised necessary capital and attracted top talent. But what drives her are the people and particularly women that will benefit from Antiva’s work.”

Antiva’s portfolio of drugs centers on human papillomavirus, or HPV, a major cause of cervical cancer. The virus also is a factor in anal cancer, head and neck cancer and genital warts. The company’s first two trials are in cervical and anal neoplasias, precancerous conditions marked by abnormal cell growth.

HPV diseases collectively is a cause that speaks to the 61-year-old Maderis as a biotech executive, trained to spot so-called “unmet medical needs,” but also as an MS patient.

“I’ve benefitted personally from biotech drugs that were not available when I started my career in biotech,” Maderis said. “Experiencing first hand the life-altering impact of new therapies has increased my commitment to developing innovative therapies in other diseases with high unmet need.”

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