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Bioclinica expands U.S. study sites with Compass Research acquisition

By Amanda Healan

Mergers and acquisitions continue in the CRO industry as companies aim to provide comprehensive trial support services alongside expansive participant recruitment networks. **Bioclinica** has acquired **Compass Research**, marking the company's first foray into the U.S. investigational site network. Financial details of the acquisition were not released.

"By joining Bioclinica, Compass Research will become part of a global organization focused on bringing clarity to clinical trials," said Elizabeth Thiele, president of Global Clinical Research for Bioclinica. "This expansion into the U.S. allows us to offer our full line of services to an even broader population of customers."

The deal is the latest in a string of mergers and acquisitions for Bioclinica. Since June 2014, the company has absorbed **Clinverse**, **Synowledge**, **MediciGroup** and **Blueprint Clinical,** and shows no signs of stopping. According to John Hubbard, Bioclinica CEO, "Compass Research will play a key role in our research network expansion, helping set the model for our continued growth in that division."

Bioclinica's 2,300 employees currently provide specialized technology-enabled services for study sites across Asia, Europe and Latin America. Compass Research employs 175 staffers and has completed some 1,300 trials involving more than 200 sponsors, which helped over 80 medications gain **FDA** approval. The newly acquired company is headquartered in Orlando, Florida, and operates two full-service study sites in the state. Compass Research will join Bioclinica's Research Network division, situated within Global Clinical Research.

The deal is expected to help Compass Research diversify its research networks and operate more efficiently. According to Sean Stanton, co-founder and CEO of Compass Research, "We have been growing organically since the inception of the business 10 years ago. Joining Bioclinica's Site Network allows us to grow more rapidly. They have the resources, the leadership and the adjacent service units, which will allow us to grow faster and better than we could have alone." Stanton is expected to remain with the company alongside fellow co-founder and CMO Craig Curtis, COO Jeff Pohlig and several Compass Research primary investigators.

No disruptions are expected for day-to-day business operations at either company. "We have been transparent with our employees about our aspirations as a company. They are not surprised, only excited about the growth and opportunity to come," assured Stanton.

Further expansion is expected for Bioclinica as the company grows its U.S. network. "Key target areas for continued growth are in the areas of technology-enabled solutions that enhance patient engagement, expanded biomarker capabilities and broadening our therapeutic and regional footprint," said Hubbard.

With the Compass Research acquisition, the company is now in all four major regional markets: Asia, Europe, Latin America and the U.S. "There is no other single organization with as large and global a footprint as our research network," asserted Thiele.

Bioclinica's portfolio expansion reflects a larger trend in how clinical trials are conducted. The escalating cost to bring a drug to market, now $2.6 billion, according to the **Tufts Center for the Study of Drug Development**, often necessitates large CROs and site networks.

"Academia cannot compete monetarily," noted Courtney Walker, project coordinator for the Infectious Diseases Clinical Trials Unit at **Case Western Reserve University**. "Expansions like this are good because they provide access to financial resources and ease recruitment of specialty populations," she added. "But as trials are farmed out to companies, research questions that arise during a trial may go unanswered. It also makes it harder and harder for universities to get the bid."

Industry-sponsored trials are conducted largely to move a drug toward regulatory approval. This is a distinctly different priority than that of academic researchers seeking trial funding to advance basic science or medical practice. Even when an industry-sponsored trial is conducted in an academic setting, university-based principal investigators face hurdles in the form of teaching and clinic responsibilities, establishing trial infrastructure and navigating internal review and tech transfer processes. According to Walker, "Even if you get funding, it is not uncommon for universities to take 50-70% off the top for overhead. That leaves little for trial infrastructure and usually takes us out of the running." As such, she said, many university principal investigators have expanded their scope of research and are increasingly cross-collaborating with other departments.

Bioclinica is now positioned to be a major player in the U.S. clinical trials market. Further mergers and acquisitions are expected across the industry as companies compete to offer the most comprehensive and cost-effective trial support services. The long-term effect on other sectors remains to be determined.

Offered Stanton, "As we grow, it will intensify the competition to rise to the level of our execution. This will allow the entire tide of clinical research to rise, which will speed up the approval process, thereby allowing more treatments and diagnostics to become available to people with these diseases."