



5 Questions With Dowdy Jackson, Ph.D., Executive Director at Innovent Biologics

“5 Questions With...” is a recurring BioBuzz series where we reach out to interesting people to share a little about themselves, their work, and maybe something completely unrelated. This week we welcome [Dowdy Jackson, Ph.D.](#), Executive Director at [Innovent Biologics](#), a company whose mission is to develop, manufacture and commercialize high-quality biopharmaceutical products that are affordable to ordinary people.

1) Please introduce yourself to our audience by looking back at your education, training, and career.

I am a California native and attended UCLA for my undergraduate studies. I intended to study marine biology, but I took Dr. Owen Witte’s class in molecular/cellular biology and knew I wanted to learn more about the field and how this knowledge could be used to develop therapies to treat cancer. I graduated with a degree in biology from UCLA and attended California State University, Dominguez Hills for my Master’s degree in molecular biology, where I studied retrotransposons in sea urchins in Dr. John Robert’s lab. I left the comfort of California and began my Ph.D. studies at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. My advisor and mentor was Dr. Dan Linzer. I identified the function of two mouse placental proteins and showed that one promoted angiogenesis while the other stopped angiogenesis. I became interested in tumor angiogenesis and worked as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of California, San Francisco in Dr. Douglas Hannahan’s lab where I studied how Eph ligands and receptors regulated tumor angiogenesis.

I knew I wanted to work in the biotechnology/pharmaceutical industry because I wanted to develop new therapies for cancer patients, so I began work at Searle and became a member of the team that developed Celebrex. I explored its potential use as a cancer therapy. After Searle was acquired by Pharmacia, which was subsequently acquired by Pfizer, I left and worked for several biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies. My interest eventually focused on developing antibody-drug conjugates, (ADCs) where I led the team at MedImmune that evaluated the first ADC that used Seattle Genetics’ MMAF payload in clinical development.

From there I led biology groups at companies developing ADCs and was fortunate to have contributed to the development of Enfortumab vedotin (PADCEV®), which is approved to treat bladder cancer. I briefly stepped away from cancer drug development and worked at TB Alliance to develop drugs to treat tuberculosis (TB) patients. This was a great experience, and I loved developing cost-effective treatments for TB patients, but I was offered a unique opportunity to build a team to develop ADCs at Innovent Biologics, a China-based biotechnology company that was starting a new site in Rockville, Maryland. I joined Innovent in August 2021 and I am leading the biology team, developing ADCs for the China and global markets.

2) Looking at your career path, you have been in the Bio & Life Sciences sector for 24 years. What are some habits you learned early on across your various roles that you continue to hone and implement today?

I think the key things I learned are; the importance of building a great team; making sure your goals, expectations and timelines are realistic and; mentoring, trusting and empowering your direct reports. My direct reports don't work *for* me – we work *together*. I want and encourage open and honest communication where I seek feedback to see where I can improve.

3) You are one year in at Innovent Biologics. What are some of the qualities that they have as an employer that persuaded you to work there?

The first thing that persuaded me to work at Innovent Biologics was having worked with my current supervisor at MedImmune. I know him, I know how he works, we work well together, and I trust him. Innovent's mission is to develop and commercialize high-quality biopharmaceuticals that are affordable to ordinary people. The fact that they consider the economic impact cancer treatment can have on a family was important. The company has the feel of a startup and they have a unique incentive plan where they will share a percentage of the profits with employees who were instrumental in developing the therapies. This is unique for the industry.

4) What are some existing differentiators and/or upcoming initiatives at Innovent Biologics that you're proud of?

I am proud of the fact that the leadership at Innovent will seek out and listen to the opinions of their employees and more importantly act on the feedback from their employees. I have worked for several companies where this wasn't the case. Innovent's leadership empowered me to revise its ADC pipeline to make it into one of the most competitive pipelines in the industry.

My colleagues and I have been given the intellectual freedom to develop new technologies to develop first in class antibody drug conjugates with the goal of delivering lifesaving treatments to cancer patients and their families while not placing them under tremendous financial burden.

**5) Referring to a conversation we had with you previously;
Can you elaborate more on the time you took a film crew
flying while working with a previous employer?**

I love aviation and have always wanted to fly since I was a child. I am a pilot who flies both single engine planes and sailplanes/gliders. When I was working for Agensys, Inc/Astellas, our company was approached by Phrma, which is an advocacy group whose mission is to conduct effective advocacy for public policies that encourage the discovery of important, new medicines for patients by biopharmaceutical research companies. They wanted to highlight scientists and their interesting hobbies as part of their Research. Progress. Hope series. I was selected as one of the scientists they wanted to highlight.

I took the film crew on a flight along the southern California coast and showed them my lab and my team. Here's the link to the video: <https://youtu.be/EaZIpWOWgZ0>