

JP Gabriel watched from the bleachers as the pandemic raged. Now head of supply chain at Ocugen, he's ready to bat

by Josh Sullivan on April 22nd, 2021



The world was in the middle of the most pressing public health risk his generation had ever seen, and JP Gabriel felt like he was sitting on the sidelines. As a VP of biologics and mRNA manufacturing at Ultragenyx, Gabriel watched from the sidelines as players like Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna used mRNA tech to chase their own Covid-19 vaccines.

This month, Gabriel got the chance to get his hands dirty against the pandemic — but it won't be with mRNA.

Gabriel has joined Ocugen as SVP of manufacturing and supply as the company looks to bring its inactivated virus vaccine for Covid-19, Covaxin, to market alongside Indian partner Bharat Biotech. On Wednesday, the partners [turned out](#) a second interim analysis from a Phase III trial [showing](#) Covaxin posted 78% efficacy in preventing symptomatic Covid-19 and 100% efficacy in preventing severe

disease.

There's been a lot of skepticism over Covaxin, which much like Russia's Sputnik V has spurred some questions over the validity of its data. Either way, Ocugen and Bharat have pledged to scale manufacturing to **produce** up to 700 million doses of the vaccine each year.

For Gabriel, that means a lot of work. He will be tasked with sourcing vaccine supply for an upcoming US trial and securing a network of contract manufacturing organizations in the US to prop up domestic manufacturing. There's a sense of urgency behind that, as holes in the supply chain have caused delays from other companies.

He'll also have to build a team of people to help establish and manage the supply chain, who's able to take on the problems that undoubtedly arise. The company said that it focused on safety rather than speed when developing the drug, and claim to have around 40 countries interested in getting doses.

"The public health crisis of our generation requires some of urgency in the response," Gabriel said.



Shankar Musunuri

Aside from its work with Covaxin, Ocugen is focused on developing gene therapies to treat blindness, through diseases such as wet age-related macular degeneration, diabetic macular edema and diabetic retinopathy. There were a few things that drew Gabriel to his new role with Ocugen, but he worked with CEO Shankar Musunuri at Wyeth Biotech in the early 2000s, and knew they complemented each other well.

"Obviously, when you're running at 200 miles per hour, you need to have really trusted players," Munsunuri said to *Endpoints*. "Really experienced, and a lot of confidence who can deliver. That was

my thinking when I reached out to JP.”

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