

## New NovoPath CEO settled in and taking questions

December 2020—CAP TODAY publisher Bob McGonnagle recently spoke with Promise Okeke, who took the helm as CEO of NovoPath last summer. Here's what Okeke had to say about NovoPath's case distribution module, customer service, and the advantages of offering a best-of-breed system, among other topics.

**Promise, I understand you are the new CEO of NovoPath. Tell us how that came about and introduce yourself.**

I was brought in by an investor group that loved what NovoPath has meant to the pathology marketplace over the past 25 years. They made an investment in NovoPath. Then I was appointed to be the new CEO.

As background, I was a premed major and I wanted to be a doctor. At some point before graduation I decided I would rather explore other career paths, particularly related to business. An excellent opportunity came about with Bain and Company in Chicago. I had the privilege with Bain to work across different industries, but primarily in the health care and retail fields. I learned a ton about strategy. It was a great launching pad. Then I worked in a startup before I wound up at Harvard to get my MBA.

After Harvard I joined Victoriaside Partners, the fund that purchased NovoPath.



Okeke

**What intrigued Victoriaside and what intrigued you not only about NovoPath but the field and the market of anatomic pathology software systems?**

It's hard not to be thrilled by the legacy of customer service that NovoPath has. Customers had tremendous things to say about the level of support and the customer service experience they've had in dealing with NovoPath. I believe customers are the most important part of any organizational framework. When you get the customers right, you are set for sustainable success. We received great reviews from everyone we spoke to about NovoPath.

In addition, we were thrilled by the technological leadership that NovoPath has. They, and now we, are on the cusp of adding new functionalities and features that support the ever-changing laboratory marketplace.

For example, we launched a cloud-based, vendor-agnostic EMR/EHR information exchange engine earlier this year. This new platform provides multifaceted labs an enhanced workflow and a more affordable approach for the lab to interact with other software systems.

Additionally, we continuously explore means to contribute to the marketplace via innovation. For example, I believe we were the first LIS [company]—while working with a whole slide imaging system vendor partner and one of our larger labs—to develop interfaces with a whole slide imaging platform in an operational environment. Leadership and innovation in the marketplace are important to us.

One more example I will provide is NovoPath's case distribution module, a feature we believe is quite unique. The one thing we kept hearing was that labs want to be more efficient. They want the right pathologist in the lab to quickly diagnose cases assigned to them, and they want their clinicians to get reports as soon as possible. One key is to have this case distribution module. Instead of having an FTE decide what case goes to pathologist X or pathologist Y, we have an algorithm that automatically assigns cases to different pathologists based on the case

type, the doctor's availability, and other factors.

Finally, I must mention talent. The talent at NovoPath is striking. We might not be the biggest brand per se, but we have entrenched talent that has been working in the industry on average for 10-plus years. Our employees live and breathe the LIS and the lab environment. They are passionate about their work. For me, that's important as we build on that framework already set for success.

**Readers will be wondering whether they can customize the case manager to their own laboratory and group.**

Absolutely. This is a macro in terms of the algorithm that we've built. We want to understand key directions. How do you want us to assign a case to this person versus that person? That's all customizable at the direction of the laboratory's workflow and needs.

**How has this case manager been received?**

It's been positive. Customers want to understand how any new product saves them money and time.

We are currently implementing this with our largest customers. If your largest customers like the product well enough to adopt it, it speaks volumes. We hope to get the rest of our base to use this, to maximize their operations and increase efficiency.

**What does the new business arrangement mean in terms of the advantage you would have by being a NovoPath customer? In other words, will you have more software development, will you have more service people, will your versioning be quicker, and so on?**

We are increasing our number of engineers and investing more in people. We are looking to do a lot more. For example, we have built a cloud solution. It's fantastic. It offers a unique user experience tailored to maximizing efficiency and speed. We hope to offer this standalone product to the marketplace as it transitions from on-site, server-based solutions to cloud-based solutions. A few customers are already using the product as a hybrid. There are some things they are able to do in the desktop and other things they are able to do in a seamlessly integrated cloud/Web-based platform, according to their preference.

We also increased our customer support staff. The bedrock of our business is customer happiness, and we are fanatically driven to ensure that. We want to be better, and we want to grow with our customers. We see our clients as partners. That's the model we're driving toward.

**Tell me what it means to be a best-of-breed vendor. I'm sure it's a term you've heard a lot, even in your evaluation. What are the advantages for customers and potential customers?**

I know not every player in the market is best of breed. I'm a big believer in the 10,000 hours rule championed by Malcolm Gladwell and others. The rule simply states that being a great leader in the market is proportional to the number of hours you spend on that product and the number of resources you've dedicated to that product. Gladwell wrote that it takes 10,000 hours of focus to achieve greatness.

We have a specialty in the space. We've been in AP for a long time and have mastered the domain—we've seen so many different workflows. And we have solutions to meet complex workflows. As the space evolves, we are evolving with our partners because we are best of breed. We understand the domain. And I think the advantage of a best of breed is you have a product fully dedicated to mastering the pathologist's needs. Competitors who don't may not prioritize the pathologist's needs in the domain. When it comes to feature or product development, those competitors usually prioritize the needs of larger specialties using their flagship products.

But this is our bread and butter. If we think, yes, this is scalable and truly meets needs, we won't hold back. We are dedicating all our resources toward making sure that that customer is having their needs met. That's what I think is the advantage of a best of breed.

**NovoPath has had a nice relationship with Allscripts. Is that relationship ongoing?**

It is ongoing. It's healthy. We are hoping to expand that partnership.

**Let me turn to the market your customers and potential customers are living in. We know that COVID has dominated everyone's thinking, planning, and budgeting, in many cases. But one thing about the AP market is that it seems to be consolidating among the pathology groups. In other words, groups are getting together, they tend to be getting bigger, they tend to be serving ever-larger systems in laboratories or in hospital systems. Is this something you see? And are you planning to help capture clients coming out of this change in the environment?**

It is something we see. Digital pathology will likely facilitate this transition. We have customers now looking at this strategy in 2021 or 2022. And a lot of bigger laboratories are going to be doing this going forward. NovoPath, again, is an industry leader when it comes to digital pathology as the first LIS to integrate in an operational environment with a WSI vendor. Today, we have integrations with the major WSI vendors.

Our platform, especially as we are now moving to the cloud, is well positioned to benefit from this transformation.

**What do you have to say to the smaller pathology group, a group that is facing the future perhaps with some anxiety not only because of consolidation—the fear they may not be able to maintain their independence or ability to steer their business—but also their needs for such specialization?**

We're not focused on one type of customer; we are looking at some of the smaller labs, and we provide excellent service to them. Community hospitals up to medical schools, up to universities, and up to very large reference labs—we span the gamut of the marketplace. We are global and we are working with companies overseas and in Canada and so on. So if there is a laboratory out there that's looking for technology and service and that type of thing, it doesn't matter how small they are or how large they are or where they're located, et cetera—we can accommodate their needs.

We have customers that are trying to work with the more advanced features and solutions, like digital pathology, sample tracking, and the case distribution manager. But we also have customers who are not at that level yet. NovoPath can come in with you as a partner at any stage and help you achieve your aims. Our solution serves many different types of customers and that makes NovoPath unique.

As you have more customers, you learn more about the marketplace, and you are optimizing your product. And then every other customer is benefiting from it. In technology, this is called a network effect. That's how a company like Google works. The more people search, the more keywords are searched, the better the algorithm. That benefit doesn't just go to Google, it also goes to the audience of Google.

Before Victoriaside bought NovoPath, as I spoke to customers, there were many times I heard them say, "One thing I like about NovoPath is the personalized service and attention that I get as a customer." The customer wants to feel special. And we have a history of treating our partners well, of providing personalized service. We want to expand our team to keep doing that so our customers can keep feeling that personalized service. We truly want to work with them as equal partners as we navigate through the transitional laboratory marketplace.

## **LigoLab operating platform supports pooled testing**

The LigoLab laboratory information system operating platform provides pooled testing capability.

"Within a matter of minutes, users are able to accurately map a 96-well plate with multiple specimens in each well, and this allows for seamless tracking of the pooled samples all the way through to resulting," said LigoLab CEO Suren Avunjian, in a press release.

The LigoLab platform maps multiple specimens in a well by scanning specimen IDs and using a visual representation of a rack that includes each well on a plate. The scanned barcodes and other relevant case information populate in each well on the computer screen. The system then creates a CSV file and automatically transmits it to the testing instrument. In the absence of an interface, a system operator generates the file and uploads it to the instrument.

After processing, the results are sent back to the LigoLab platform, at which point a laboratorian can manually

review all results and release those that are negative, or the lab can configure the system to automatically release negative results. Pooled samples that are positive or inconclusive are rerun as individual samples.

"The platform is designed for high-volume testing and integrates with a variety of systems, instruments, robotics, and other automation platforms to allow for quick, streamlined, and error-free processing," Avunjian said.

[LigoLab](#), 818-395-4659

## **JPC contracts with Proscia and Huron Digital Pathology**

The federal government's Joint Pathology Center has selected Proscia's Concentriq digital and computational pathology platform and Huron Digital Pathology's Lagotto image search engine to modernize its tissue repository.

The center, a part of the U.S. Defense Health Agency, will use Concentriq to digitize its tissue archive, the world's largest and nation's oldest repository of human pathology specimens. "With Concentriq, JPC will provide its network of researchers with intuitive, secure access to its data and streamline collaboration, enabling them to more easily analyze thousands of diseases and find new ways to fight them," according to a press release from Proscia.

The Joint Pathology Center will use Huron's artificial intelligence-enabled Lagotto image search engine to index and search the center's digital image archive. "JPC will use Lagotto to unlock the wealth of knowledge housed in the JPC's repository to enhance biomedical research for infectious diseases and cancer and enable easier data sharing with researchers, diagnosticians, and educators to facilitate collaboration and medical advances," Huron reported.

The Joint Pathology Center assumed many of the responsibilities of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology when the AFIP was disestablished. It houses more than 55 million glass slides, 31 million paraffin-embedded tissue blocks, and over 500,000 wet tissue samples collected over more than 100 years.

[Proscia](#), 877-255-1341

[Huron Digital Pathology](#), 519-886-9013

## **Orchard offering AWS cloud-based platform**

Orchard Software has added Amazon Web Services as a cloud-based hosting solution for its Orchard Harvest laboratory information system. Long-time client Northwest Alabama Cancer Center has transitioned to Orchard Cloud Services using AWS, according to an Orchard press release.

[Orchard Software](#), 800-856-1948

*Dr. Aller practices clinical informatics in Southern California. He can be reached at [raller@usc.edu](mailto:raller@usc.edu). Dennis Winsten is founder of Dennis Winsten & Associates, Healthcare Systems Consultants. He can be reached at [dwinsten.az@gmail.com](mailto:dwinsten.az@gmail.com).*