

Interview with Eisai Innovation President Yoshiharu Mizui



Yoshiharu Mizui
President
[Eisai Innovation](#)

Q1: What is your current work in Boston? And how did you start doing this work?

I serve as the President of Eisai Innovation, Inc. (EII), an investment arm of Eisai. EII is headquartered in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and also has an office in San Francisco, California. We act as a strategic investor for start-up companies to explore and support potential synergies with Eisai's R&D focuses. Our investment focus is on preclinical oncology and neurology therapeutics and related solutions.

I started my career as scientist in discovery research at Eisai and worked at Tsukuba Research Laboratories for 20 years. After that I had the opportunity to join H3 Biomedicine (H3B) as one of the founding members. H3B is a startup company in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which is 100 percent owned by Eisai.

After working at H3 Biomedicine for 5 years, I started thinking about how to incorporate the start-up knowledge I had attained to help Eisai pivot to a new area like immuno-oncology, as I know it is often very difficult for mid-sized companies to make investments like this. So, I decided to move to the business side from the R&D side and served as Head of Business Development/Strategy for Eisai's Oncology Business Group for about three years. During that period, I created a proposal for a corporate venture investment company under the guidance of our Chief Strategy Officer (CSO). It was eventually approved by Eisai's Executive Committee. As a result, a Corporate Venture Investment department was created by Eisai in May 2019, which operates under the CSO. Subsequently, we established EII in United States in August 2019. I was named as its President and started working as the investor in our Cambridge office.

Q2: What is your impression of Boston as an ecosystem for startups?

Many companies are establishing their presence in the United States. In the health care sectors, Boston and San Francisco are the top two ecosystems. As a result, we decided to set up offices in both cities. Boston has many pharmaceutical companies, biotechnology companies, academic institutes, universities, hospital, and investors. All of them are clustered in very small areas, which creates a very active ecosystem. Boston is the best place for talented scientists, entrepreneurs, and investors to make their dreams happen.

Q3: How was your experience being a judge at the February 11th pitch event?

It was great experience to be a judge at the pitch event. I learned a lot from the companies who made their pitches. The presentations and Q&A time were limited, but all of the stakeholders, presenters, judges, organizers did a very good job.

Q4: What was your impression of the Japanese startups who pitched?

All of the presenters prepared excellent slide decks and made great pitches. The business scopes were quite diverse, and included cell therapy, radiotherapy sensitizer, aptamer, drug delivery to brain, and digital solutions. I personally wanted to see more state-of-the-art technologies, which have the potential to transform future human health care. I have seen that great science finds a way to be commercialized. The commercial path forward is very important as a startup company, but incremental technology might not give them the advantage over their competitors that they are seeking.

Q5: Do you have any tips/advice for Japanese startups hoping to expand overseas in Boston?

Japanese startups will find a wide range of talented people and capital to fuel their growth in Boston. I would recommend they bring their innovative science and ideas, in order to compete with many competitors. By doing that, their science and business will be noticed, and they will eventually be able to realize their dreams.