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Bridge fund invests in EarlySense of Israel

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Bridge Investment Fund L.P. in Cleveland has participated in a \$4.8 million financing round for an Israeli company that is developing a system to monitor patients who have asthma, congestive heart failure and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Bridge participated in the third money-raising round for EarlySense Ltd. in Ramat Gan, Israel. EarlySense is developing a system that can detect changes in a patient's breathing and heart rate, alerting the patient to get early treatment, which can head off a full-blown attack or hospitalization.

EarlySense executives met with potential clinical and financial partners in Cleveland and Akron a few times last year, said Michael Goldberg, Bridge managing partner. Those meetings "allowed us to validate what they were doing . . . and to see what kind of collaborations we could be involved in," Goldberg said.

"This is one of the biggest opportunities or challenges for us, trying to find companies that have real fits with the region," he said.

EarlySense is in the final stages of getting Food and Drug Administration approval to enter the U.S. market this year, Goldberg said.

The Israeli company wants to set up sales, marketing and clinical development operations in Northeast Ohio, said Baiju Shah, chief executive of BioEnterprise, the regional bioscience development organization.

"We are helping them identify the right partnerships and the right people here," Shah said. "It is a very exciting company."

Bridge's investment in EarlySense has helped BioEnterprise earn a seat at the table with other Israeli venture capital firms, Shah said.

Bridge also recently received a \$2 million investment from the Ohio Capital Fund, the fund-of-funds created by the Ohio General Assembly in 2005. Through a joint venture, Peppertree Partners in Pepper Pike co-manages the fund, which invests in venture capital funds that, in turn, invest at least half of their money in young Ohio companies.

Bridge could get another \$1 million from the Capital Fund if the Cleveland fund reaches investor commitments of \$10 million, Goldberg said. The fund stands at \$8 million in commitments, he said.

The Capital Fund money will probably enable Bridge to make slightly larger investments, Goldberg said. EarlySense is the local fund's second investment.

The commitment from the state fund also validates local efforts to create relationships with Israeli bioscience companies and venture capitalists.

"The Capital Fund investment is an exciting validation for our whole Israeli-Ohio effort," Shah said.

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