

Why the nation's largest independent dialysis lab is hiring, expanding in Sunnyvale



Image: Ascend Clinical

A look inside Ascend Clinical's new labs in Sunnyvale.

COURTESY OF ASCEND CLINICAL



By **Ron Leuty** – Senior Reporter, San Francisco Business Times
Oct 25, 2022

The nation's largest independent laboratory for kidney dialysis testing, Ascend Clinical LLC, is stretching out.

After spreading across four buildings in Redwood City, the company is settling into a Sunnyvale building of more than 100,000 square feet where it tests samples from dialysis patients as well as the water systems of dialysis centers.

The company now has the capacity to run 1.5 million tests a day from end-stage renal disease patients who face dialysis three times a week.

But the water testing for those dialysis centers is a growing part of Ascend's business, said Jeff Vizethann, the company's first employee and executive vice president of sales. Giant dialysis company DaVita Inc. (NYSE: DVA), for example, uses Ascend to test water that's looped across 20-30 machines in more than 100 of its dialysis centers.

Ascend's water and environmental lab, run by microbiologist Wesley Rodriguez, quadruples in size with the expansion to Sunnyvale, Vizethann said. "We've grown water testing significantly," Vizethann said.

Ascend started in 2000 as a spinout of a Stanford University doctor's nonprofit dialysis center. It has since grown to cover 98% of the dialysis market – with mom-and-pop offices with a single dialysis machine as well as San Jose-based at-home dialysis company Outset Medical Inc. (NASDAQ: OM) and others flying samples into the Bay Area for next-day results.

"The biggest reason for the growth is there are more blood clients and more dialysis centers," Vizethann said. "We've landed some big accounts and we don't churn accounts."

The company, led by CEO Paul Beyer, has about 400 employees, including 250-300 in the Bay Area, but plans to hire up to 100 people with the Sunnyvale expansion to the new building at 435 Oakmead Parkway.

"We're fast and flexible in an industry not known for its innovation," Vizethann said.

Ascend built a web-based system for online ordering and results for its customers, which now number about 400, and produced the industry's first mobile app, Vizethann said. What's more, he said, Ascend has tapped automated pipetting – the process of moving small amounts of liquid for testing – and uses an artificial intelligence-based system that requires less blood, which is better for nurses trying to draw samples and patients who often must balance the risk of anemia that comes from a lack of healthy red blood cells.

"The market share comes mostly from organic growth," he said. "We're just doing it right and doing it well. We almost never lose clients."