

[Home](#) / [Hintergrund](#) / [People](#) / ETH Founders Community: «We want to save lives...

**ETH FOUNDERS COMMUNITY:**

## «We want to save lives from drug overdoses»

12. April 2015 · [Ragulan Vivekananthan](#) · [Keine Kommentare](#)

In regelmässigen Abständen versorgt uns [Sunnie J. Groeneveld](#) mit einem spannenden Interview. Diesmal hat sie sich mit Meriam Kabbaj, COO von [Versantis](#), getroffen.



Die Köpfe hinter Versantis sind Vincent Forster (r.), Meriam Kabbaj und Prof. Jean-Christophe Leroux. (Bild: Tina Sturzenegger/zvg)

Bei Leberversagen kann der Körper Abfälle nicht loswerden, was lebensbedrohlich sein kann. Und obschon weltweit 450 Millionen Patienten von Leberversagen betroffen sind, mangelt es an einfachen

und effizienten Entgiftungsmethoden. Dieser Umstand hat Meriam Kabbaj, Vincent Forster und Prof. Jean-Christophe Leroux dazu veranlasst [ein neues Dialyseverfahren zu entwickeln](#), das Dank seiner technischen Einfachheit auch in Entwicklungsländern angewendet werden kann.

Das Startup hat in letzter Zeit für viel Gesprächsstoff gesorgt. So hat man das [Venture Kick Finale](#) und 130'000 Franken gewonnen. Desweiteren hat Kabbaj's Kollege Vincent Forster am letztjährigen [venture leaders](#) Programm in Boston und New York teilgenommen. Im Gespräch mit Sunnie J. Groeneveld stellt sie ihr Unternehmen Versantis vor.

**SUNNIE:** Who are you and how did you get involved with Versantis?

**MERIAM:** I'm a pharmacist by training, with a PhD in pharmacokinetics from the University of Montreal. I worked for 10 years for a CRO company doing phase I studies. After working for 10 years for the same company, I really wanted to do something new, something where I could impact the development of the company more. Thanks to professor Leroux at ETH I heard about Versantis and joined in 2014.

**SUNNIE:** What does Versantis do?

**MERIAM:** Our aim is to revolutionize dialysis to save lives from drug overdoses and liver failures. We use small lipid vesicles (i.e. liposomes) to efficiently and rapidly extract toxic compounds from the blood. Our technology is an improved peritoneal dialysis solution, i.e. we enhance the capacity of the traditional peritoneal dialysis and make it as efficient as hemodialysis. The big advantage is that peritoneal dialysis is safer, much less invasive and also less expensive than hemodialysis.

**SUNNIE:** How big is your team and when did you get started?

**MERIAM:** We just incorporated our company in mid-March this year, so we still have quite a journey ahead of ourselves. We are three founders, Vincent Forster is the CEO, myself I'm the COO, and our third founder is Prof. Jean-Christoph Leroux. We also have a postdoc who is helping us with the technology in the lab. She, in turn, manages three master students. They all work very hard and play a significant role in developing a prototype ready for animal and human testing.

**SUNNIE:** You've had some great early successes. What are some of the highlights from the last months?

**MERIAM:** The last three months were amazing. We incorporated the company and secured over a million for our seed round, which is more than we expected so we're very happy. In addition to the financial support from the ZKB, our CTI project got approved in December last year; we also managed to get a research loan from the Volkswirtschaftsstiftung as well as the Gebert-Rüf Stiftung. And then VentureKick was the last big news: we won all three rounds. We are very proud of these early successes but we have already moved on to the next steps, in preparation of next year.

**SUNNIE:** Are there areas where you're looking for advice?

**MERIAM:** Honestly the question should be if there are any areas where we are not looking for advice. Until now we learnt so much from people we met; I am pretty sure it helped us avoid many mistakes. It is true that as entrepreneur we sometimes feel lonely, so any means to exchange ideas, such as the ETH Founders Community but also the [ETH ieLab](#) set-up, are very useful and very much appreciated.

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