

# Developing and deploying *N*-of-1 gene-editing therapies

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MRA

**ADVANCING  
KNOWLEDGE  
FOR  
GOOD**

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Research, Perelman School of Medicine  
at the University of Pennsylvania

Relationships with Verve Therapeutics,  
Canstar Therapeutics, Lexon

# Typical case of neonatal-onset urea cycle disorder

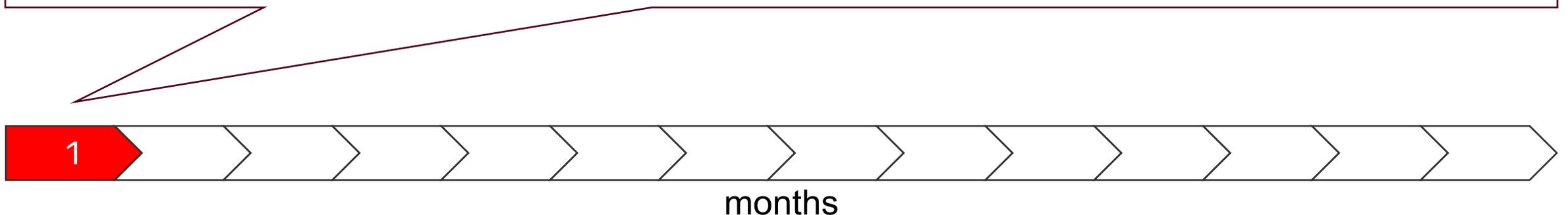
A 1-day-old male infant was noted to have poor feeding and increased sleepiness in the well-baby nursery. He was transferred to the **neonatal intensive care unit**.

The **blood ammonia level** was significantly elevated **>1000  $\mu\text{mol/L}$**  (normal for age is  $<33 \mu\text{mol/L}$ ).

Over the next 12 hours, he was transferred to a tertiary care pediatric hospital 3 hours away for emergent management, including **48 hours of dialysis**.

His newborn screening and initial metabolic labs were consistent with a diagnosis of **citrullinemia type 1**. He was initiated on ammonia-scavenging medications and medical formula.

He was discharged from the hospital by day of life 20.



# Typical case of neonatal-onset urea cycle disorder

Unfortunately, he was **readmitted at 1 month of life** with poor feeding, diarrhea, and an **elevated ammonia level of 250  $\mu\text{mol/L}$** .

Over the first 12 months of life, he was **readmitted to the hospital 6 more times** for recurrent episodes of hyperammonemia.

He was also noted to have difficulty feeding, requiring **gastrostomy tube placement** at 6 months of age.



# Typical case of neonatal-onset urea cycle disorder

The family decided to pursue **liver transplantation**, and he was listed for transplant at 10 months of age after he had grown to an appropriate size. He received a deceased donor transplant when he was 13 months of age.

His post-transplantation period was complicated by a **bile leak** and episodes of **acute rejection** requiring increased doses of immunosuppression.

He had no further hyperammonemic crises after transplantation, but he required **4 additional hospitalizations for transplant-related complications**.



# Typical case of neonatal-onset urea cycle disorder

He is currently 6 years old and continues to require post-transplantation immunosuppression.

He suffers from **global developmental delay**.

He requires help with dressing and toileting, but he can speak in 2-word phrases and enjoys attending his special needs kindergarten.

The aggregate health care costs for this individual have **totaled > US\$ 2 million**.



# Typical case of neonatal-onset urea cycle disorder

What if we could have intervened with a personalized liver-directed corrective gene-editing therapy early in this patient's life?

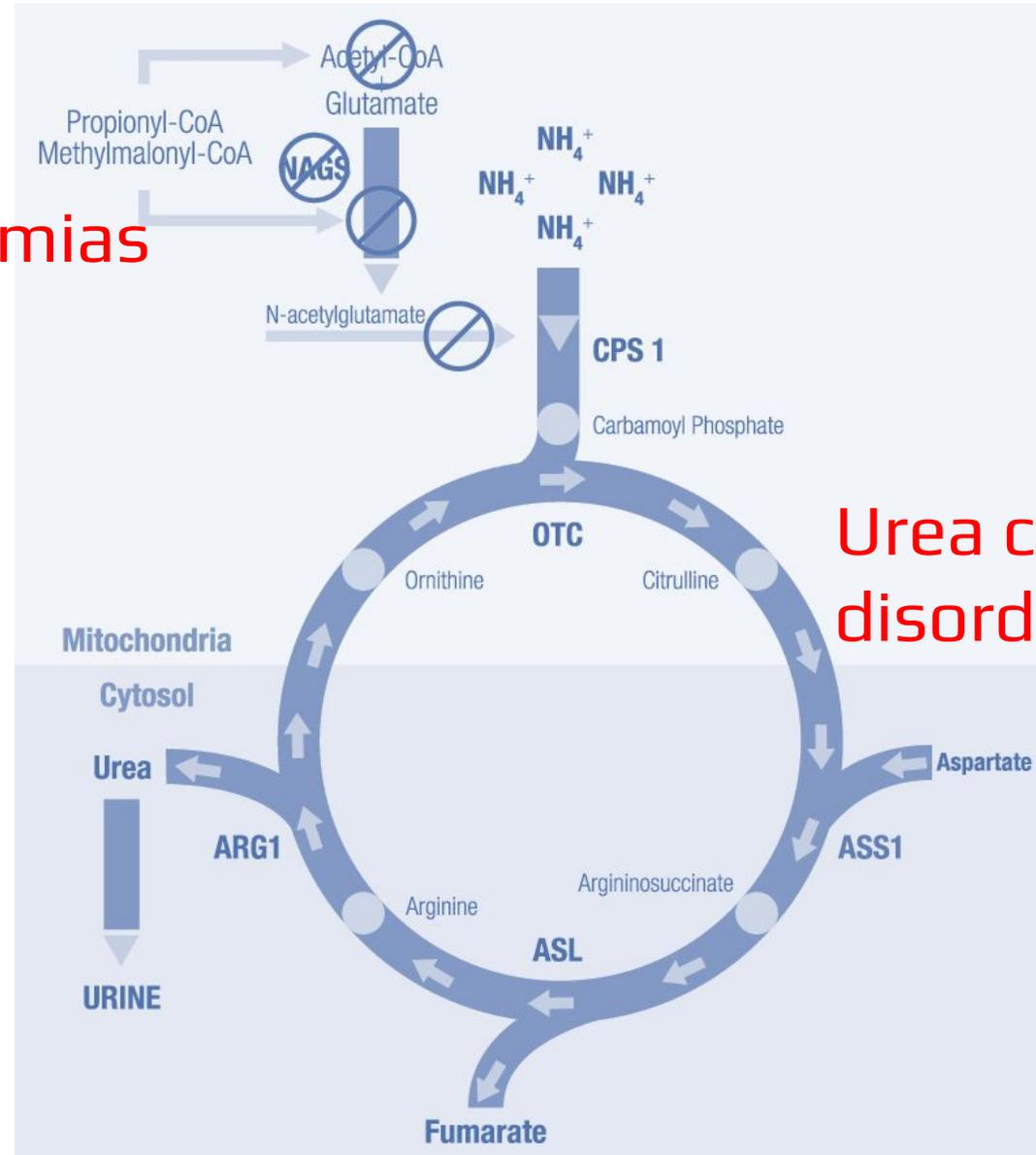


# Newborn patients with grievous inborn errors of metabolism

## Organic acidemias

Hyperammonemia episodes, starting immediately after birth, cause **progressive brain damage** and **early death**

Liver transplantation—if **available**—has to be deferred until **late infancy** and has substantial morbidity and mortality



Rebecca  
Ahrens-Nicklas  
CHOP

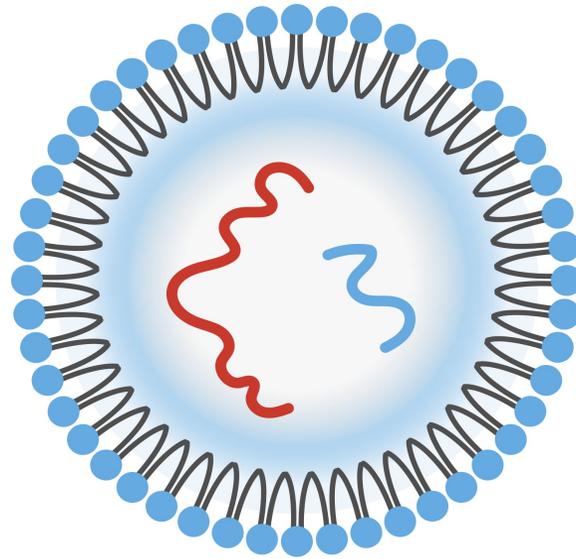


Fyodor  
Urnov  
IGI/UC  
Berkeley



Protecting against the world's leading killer

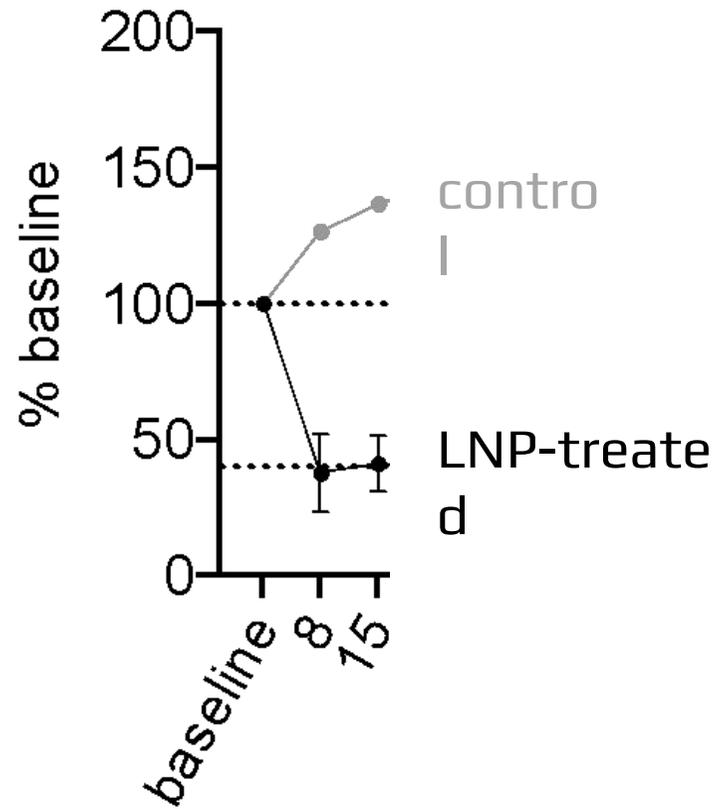
# Editing via lipid nanoparticles (LNPs), base editor mRNA, and guide RNA



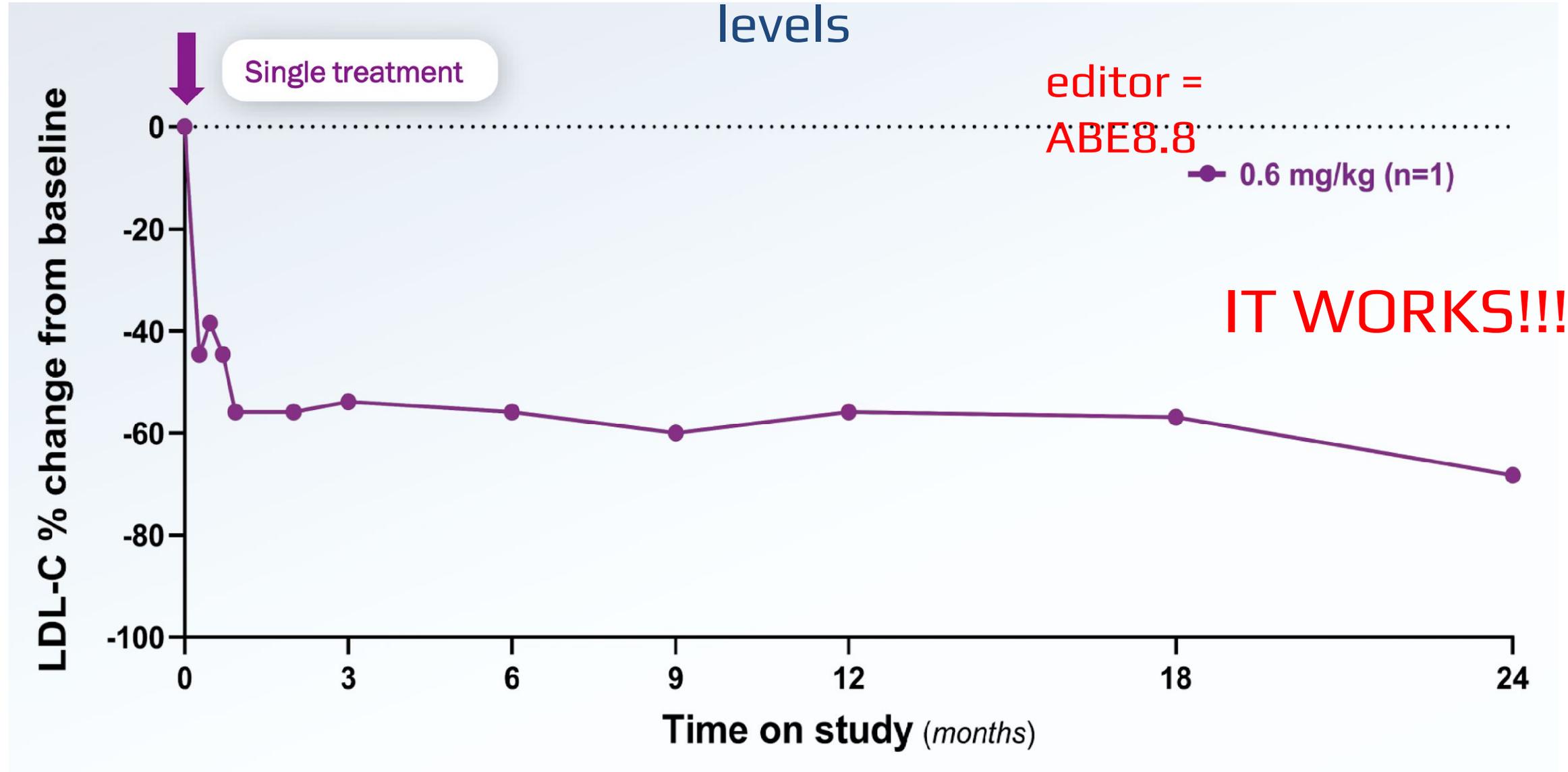
# LNP base editing of *PCSK9* in the liver in monkeys – LDL cholesterol levels

LDL cholesterol

editor =  
ABE8.8



# LNP base editing of *PCSK9* in heart disease patients – LDL cholesterol levels



Correcting pathogenic variants to  
definitively treat rare genetic disorders



Credit: Erik Jacobs

Anthony Parrazzo (center) counts out 11 pills of Kuvan, which he takes every day to help manage his PKU. Lauren Ward (left) and Samantha Parrazzo (right) take a powdered form of the drug.

phenylketonuria (PKU)

=

high phenylalanine  
levels

=

neurological problems,  
avoided only with strict  
diet & daily pills/shots

## Base editing for correction of PKU variants in *PAH* gene in the liver

- **c.1222C>T (R408W)** – 22.4% allele frequency (AF)
- c.1066–11G>A (splice site) – 6.5% AF
- c.782G>A (R261Q) – 5.5% AF
- c.728G>A (R243Q) – 3.7% AF
- c.1315+1G>A (splice site) – 3.6% AF
- **c.842C>T (P281L)** – 3.2% AF

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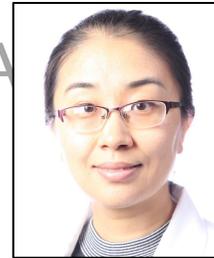
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UPenn



Dominique Brooks  
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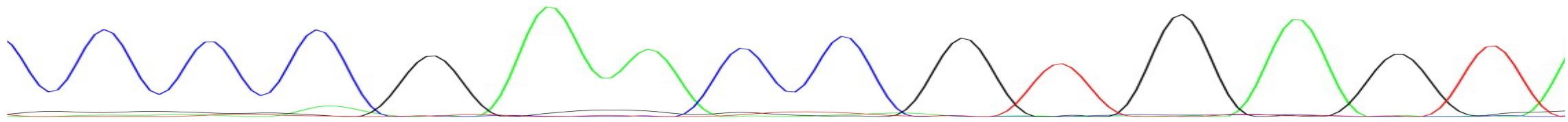
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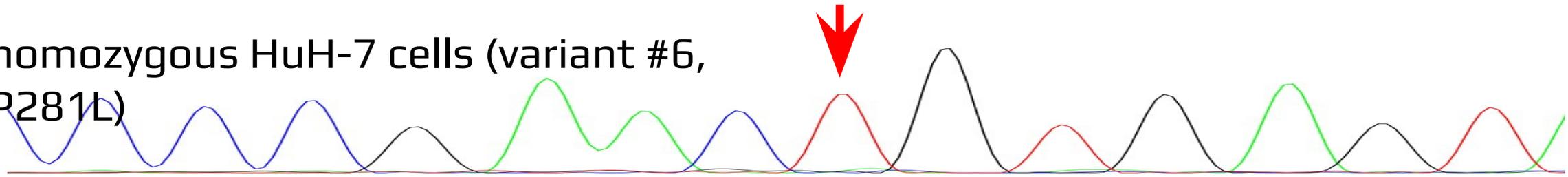
William Peranteau  
CHOP

# Introducing *PAH* variants into HuH-7 human hepatoma cells via prime editing

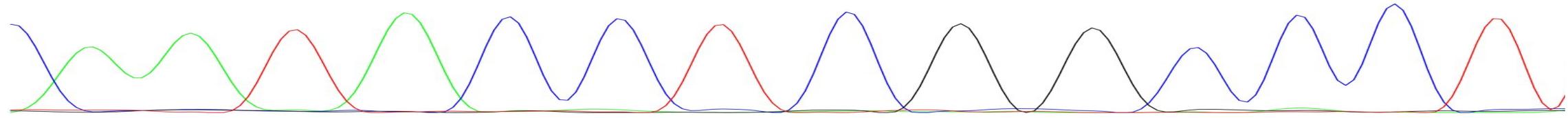
wild-type HuH-7 cells



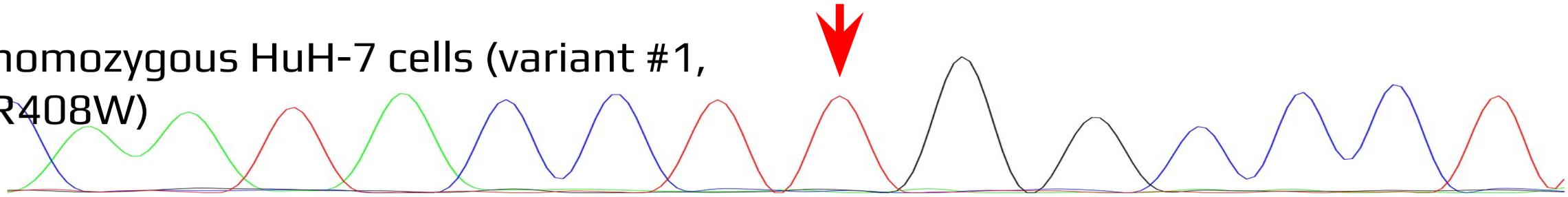
homozygous HuH-7 cells (variant #6, P281L)



wild-type HuH-7 cells

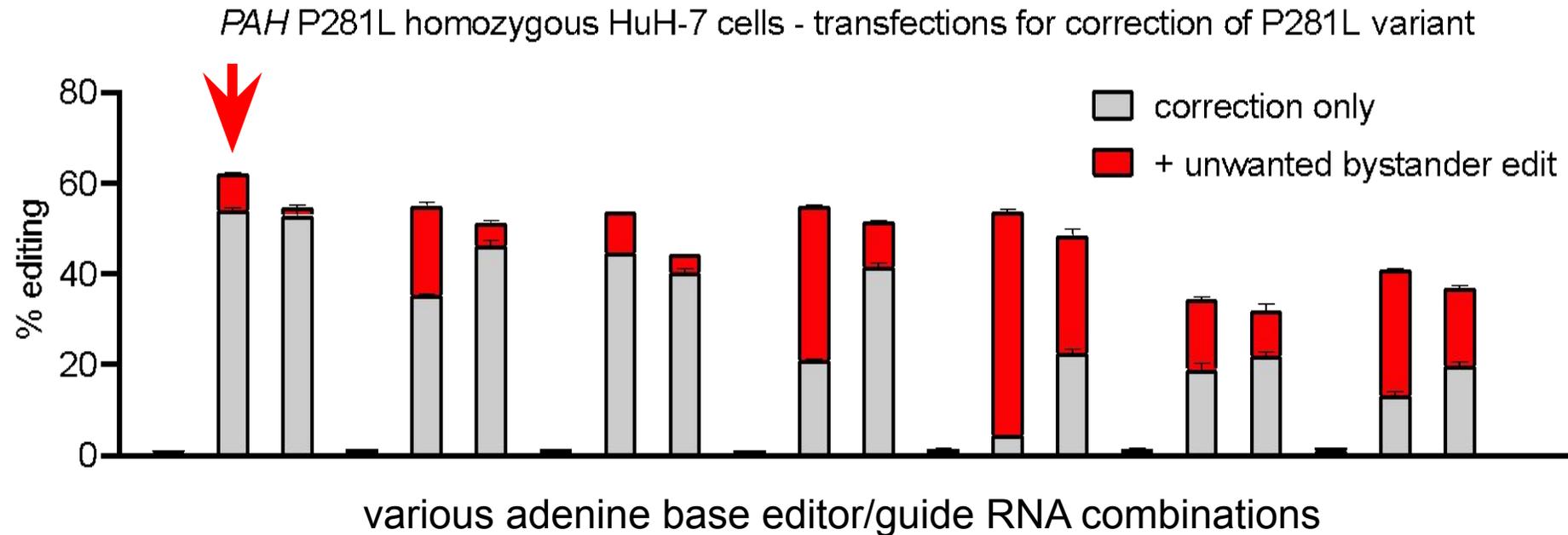


homozygous HuH-7 cells (variant #1, R408W)



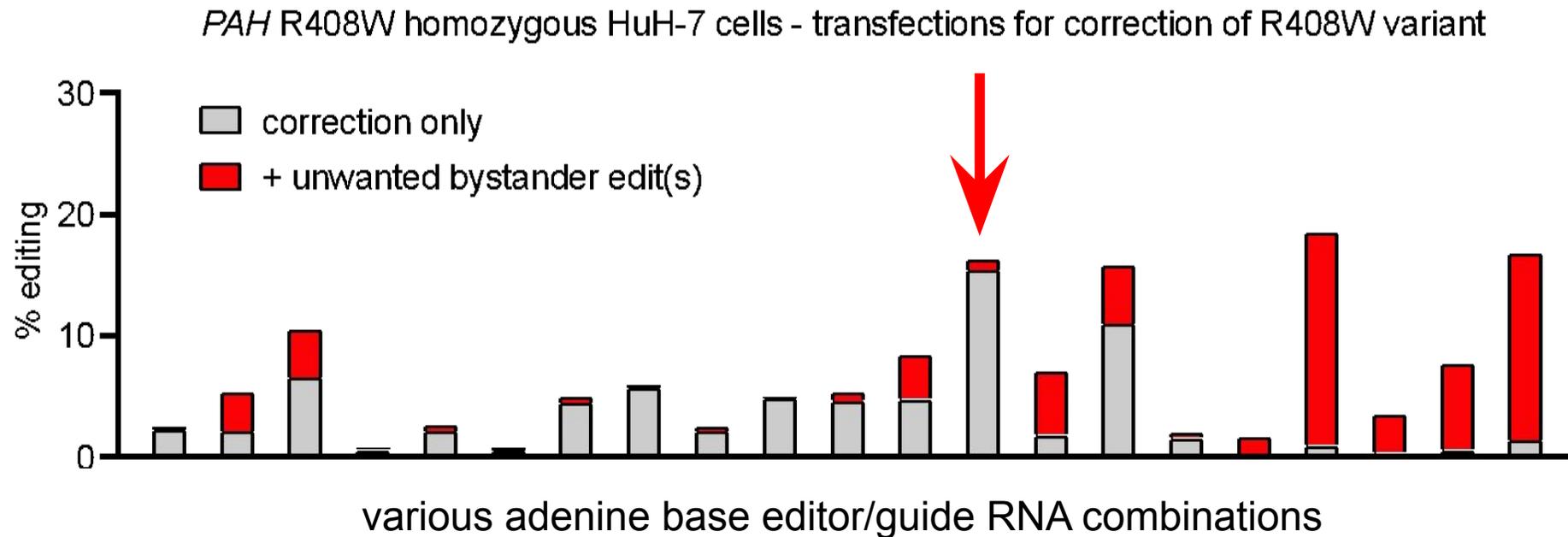
# Base editing to correct P281L & R408W variants in HuH-7 cells

variant #6 = P281L editor = ABE8.8



# Base editing to correct P281L & R408W variants in HuH-7 cells

variant #1 = R408W editor = SpRY-ABE8.8



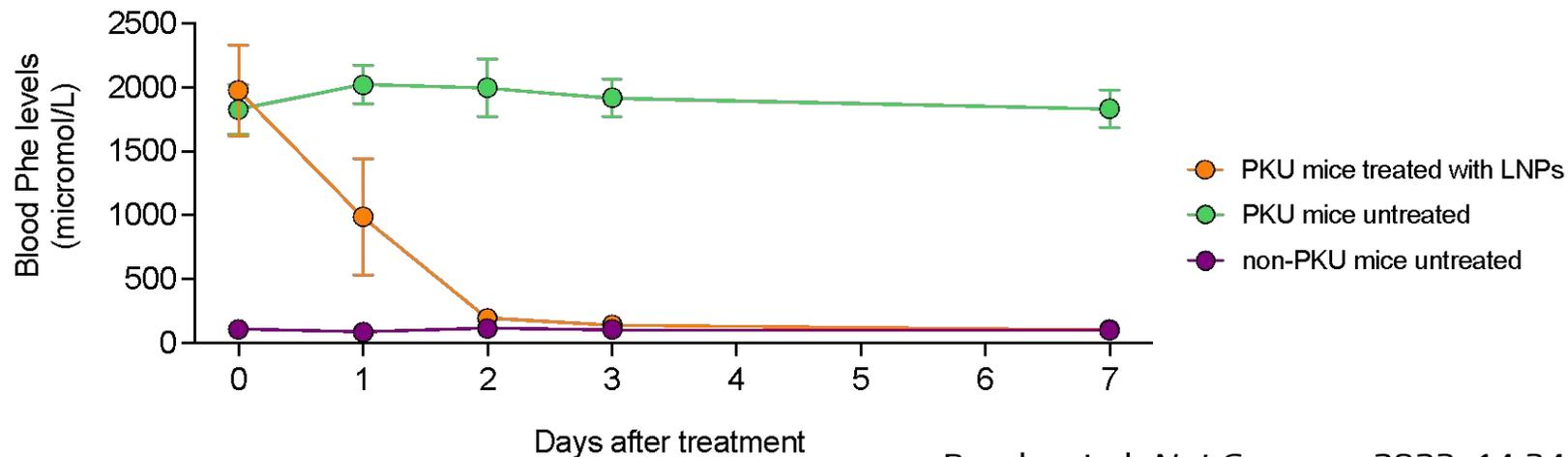
# Mouse model with “humanized” *PAH* allele(s)



# LNP base editing treatment of "humanized" PKU mice (P281L or R408W)

PAH P281L mice (variant #6)

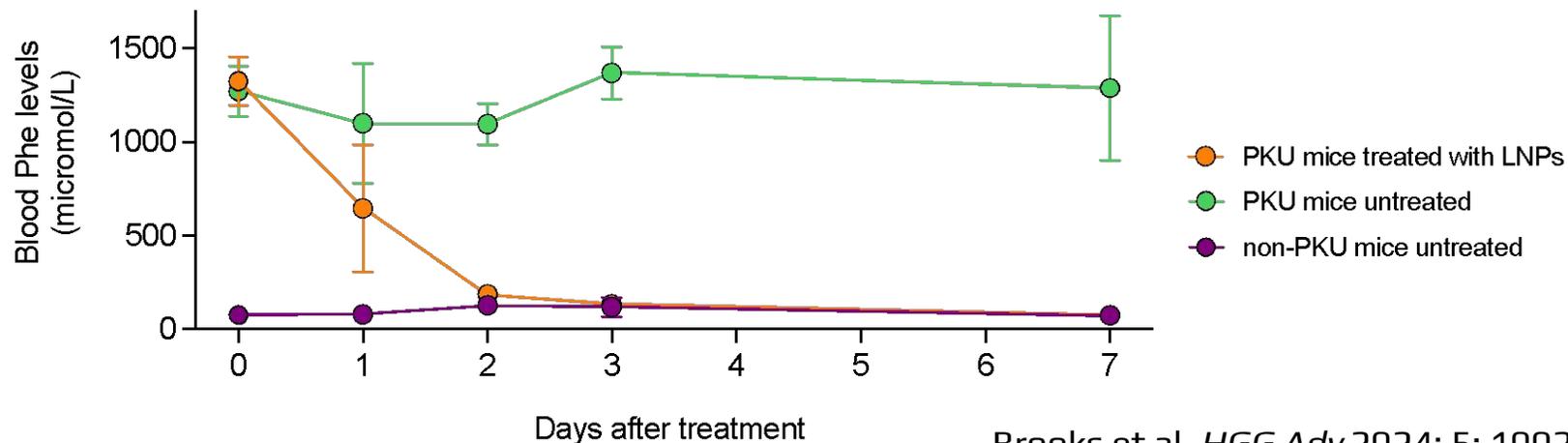
LNPs with ABE8.8 mRNA + PAH1 gRNA - short term



Brooks et al. *Nat Commun* 2023; 14:3451

PAH R408W mice (variant #1)

LNPs with SpRY-ABE8.8 mRNA + PAH4 gRNA - short term



Brooks et al. *HGG Adv* 2024; 5: 100253

# LNP base editing treatment of "humanized" PKU mice (P281L or R408W)

PAH P281L mice (variant #6)

whole-liver editing  
on-target correction = 40%

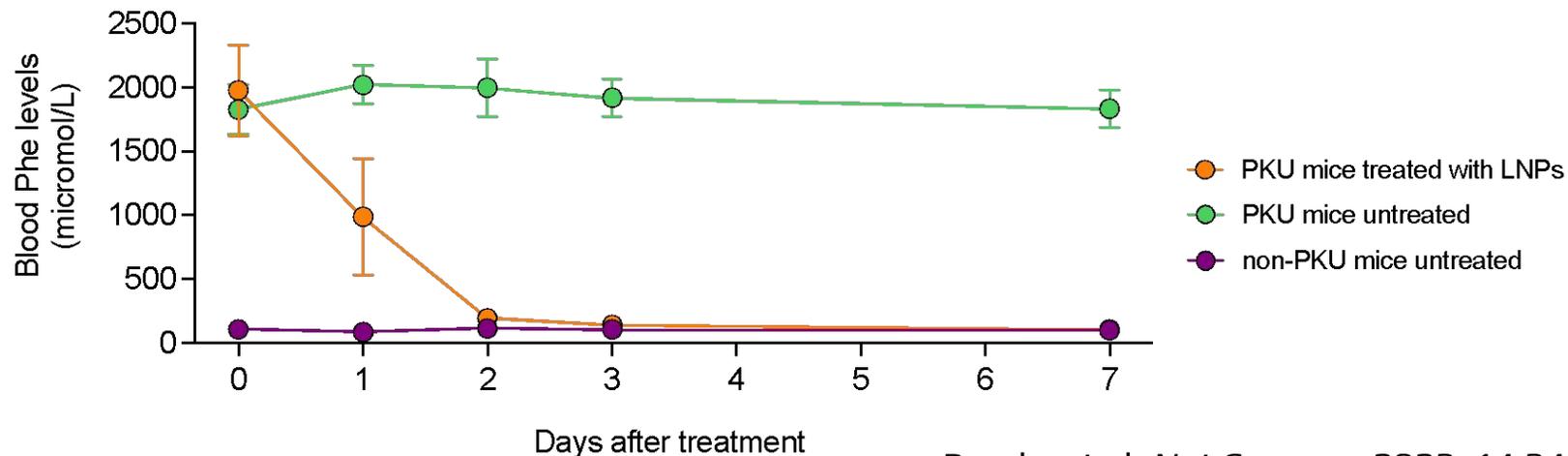
unwanted bystander = 0.8%

PAH R408W mice (variant #1)

whole-liver editing  
on-target correction = 26%  
unwanted bystander = 2.8%

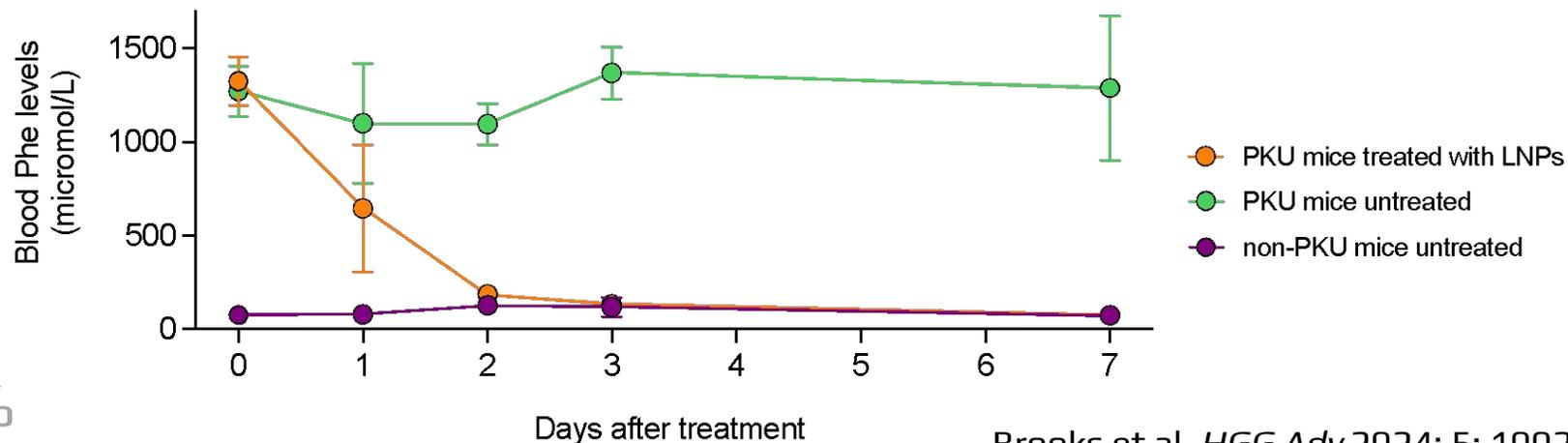
## R408W

LNPs with ABE8.8 mRNA + PAH1 gRNA - short term



Brooks et al. *Nat Commun* 2023; 14:3451

LNPs with SpRY-ABE8.8 mRNA + PAH4 gRNA - short term

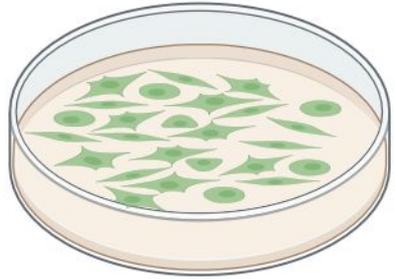


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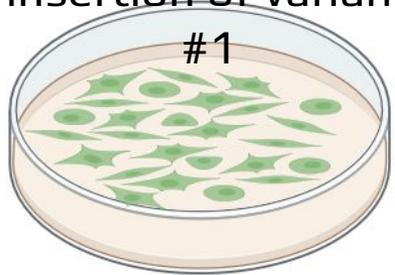
## Most frequent classic PKU variants in *PAH* gene

<b>c.1222C&gt;T (R408W)</b>	<b>22.1%</b>	c.331C>T (R111X)	
1.0%			
c.1066-11G>A (splice site)	6.4%	c.441+5G>T (splice site)	
1.0%			
c.782G>A (R261Q)	5.5%	c.168+5G>C (splice site)	
0.9%			
c.728G>A (R243Q)	3.6%	c.1238G>C (R413P)	0.9%
c.1315+1G>A (splice site)	3.5%	c.1045T>C (S349P)	0.8%
<b>c.842C&gt;T (P281L)</b>	<b>3.1%</b>	c.1042C>G (L348V)	0.7%
c.473G>A (R158Q)	2.5%	c.1068C>A (Y356X)	0.7%
c.194T>C (I65T)	1.8%	c.165delT	0.7%
c.754C>T (R252W)	1.5%	c.442-1G>A (splice site)	0.6%
c.611A>G (T204C)	1.4%	c.814G>T (G272X)	
0.5%			

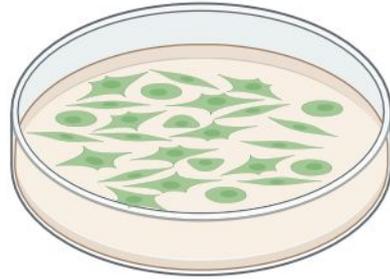
# Rapid, standardized screening for corrective editing in cells



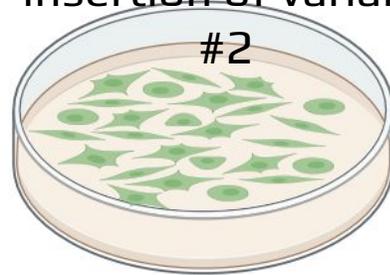
HuH-7 cells edited  
for  
insertion of variant  
#1



HuH-7 cells edited  
for  
insertion of variant  
#3

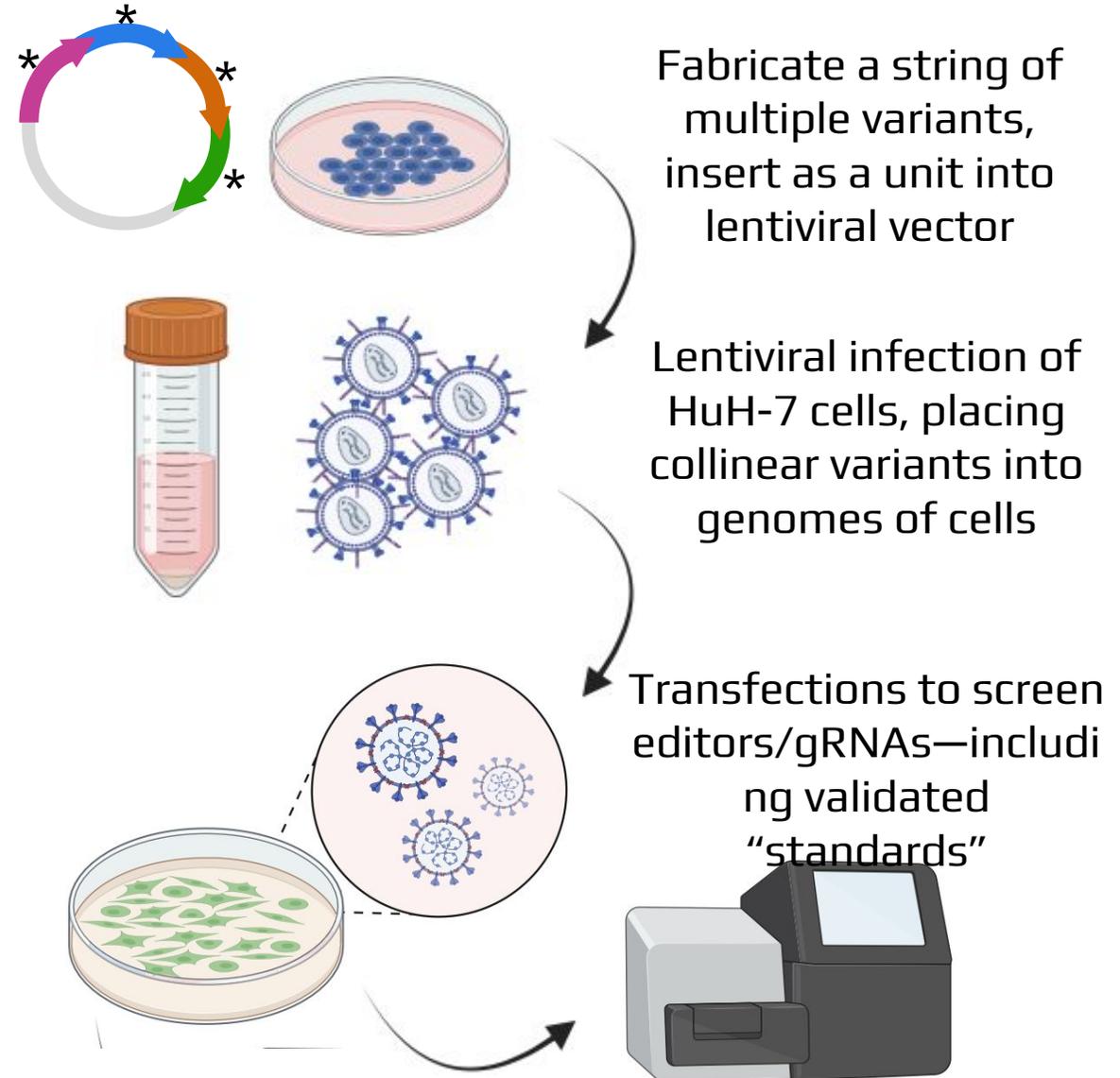
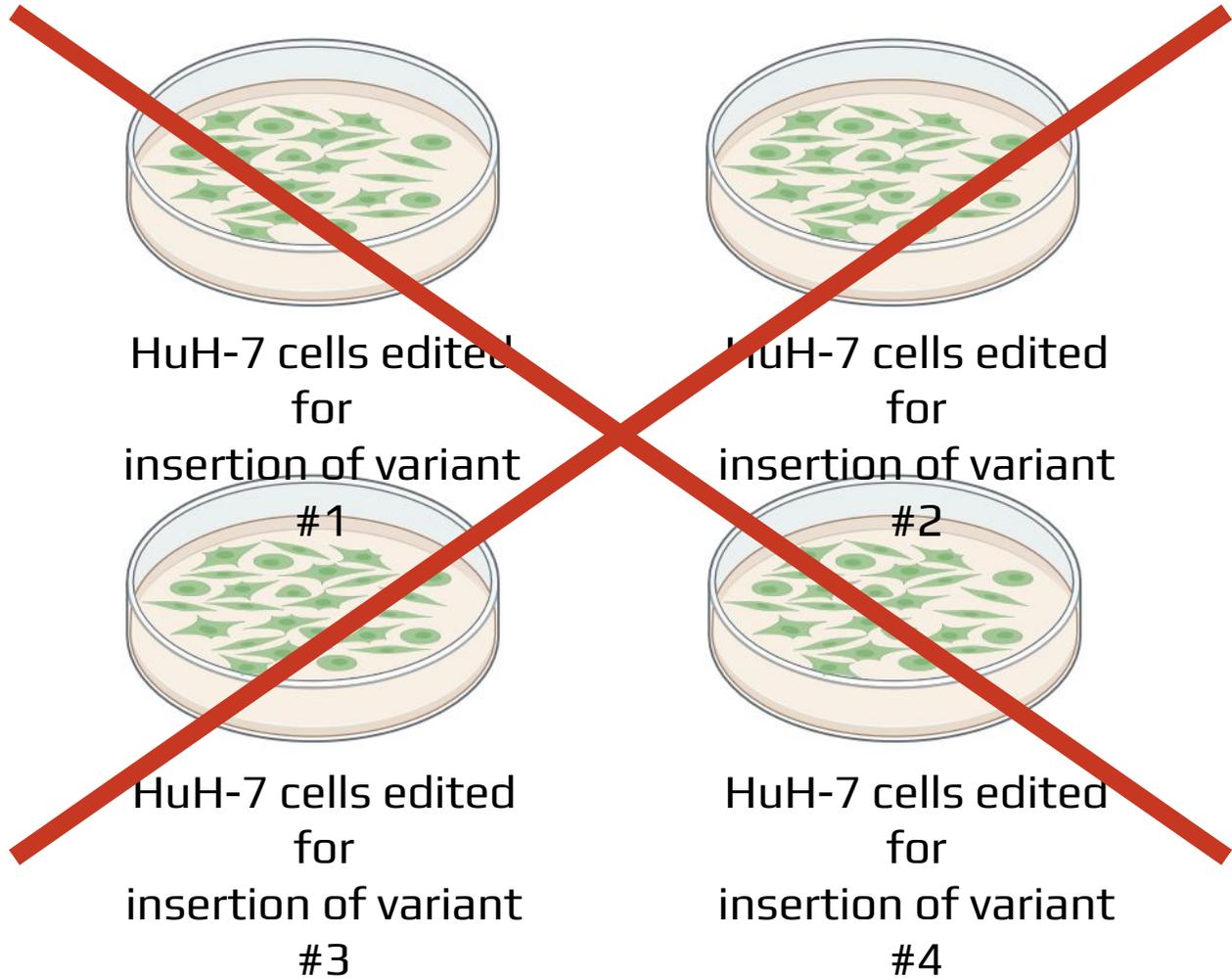


HuH-7 cells edited  
for  
insertion of variant  
#2

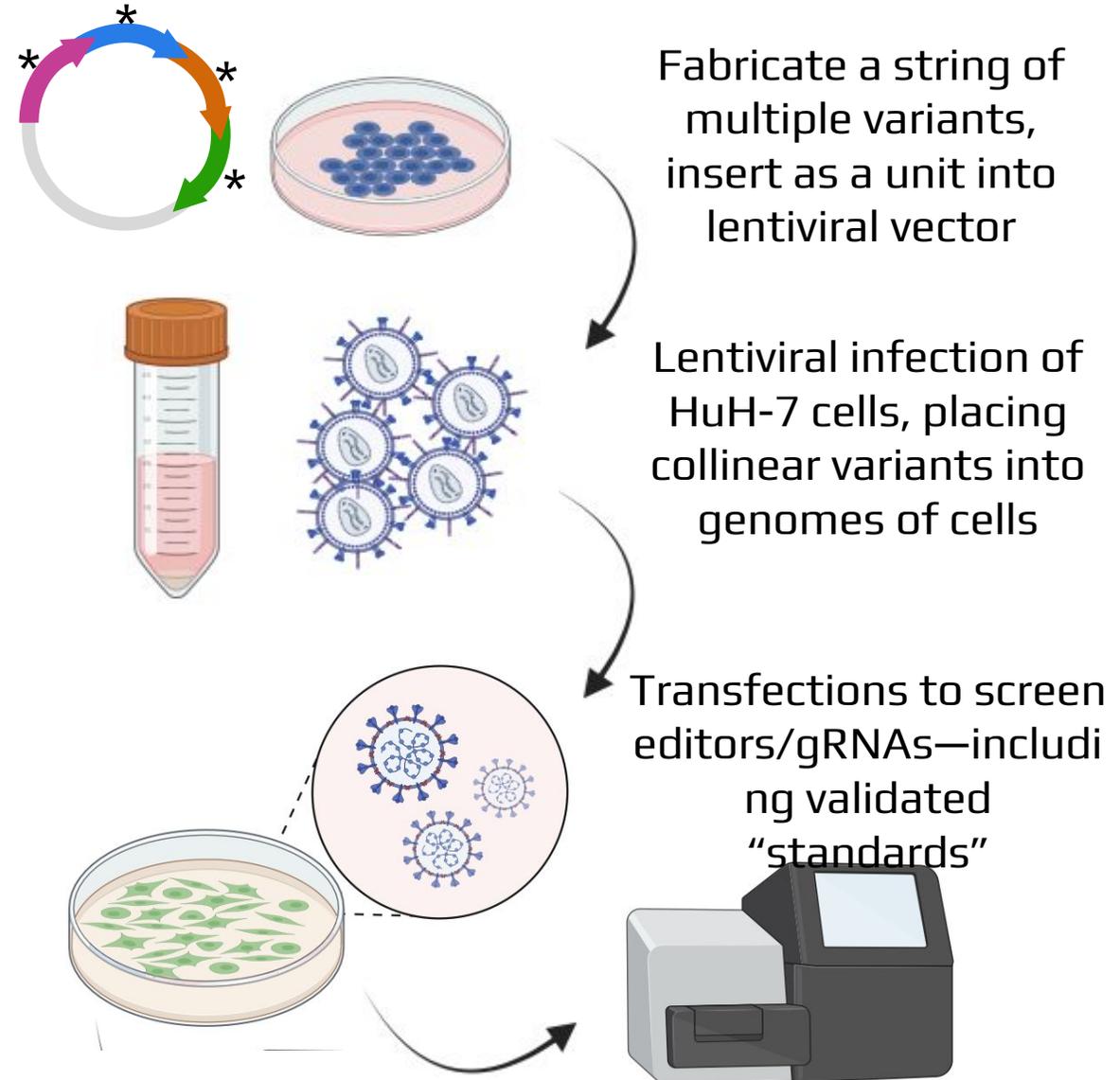
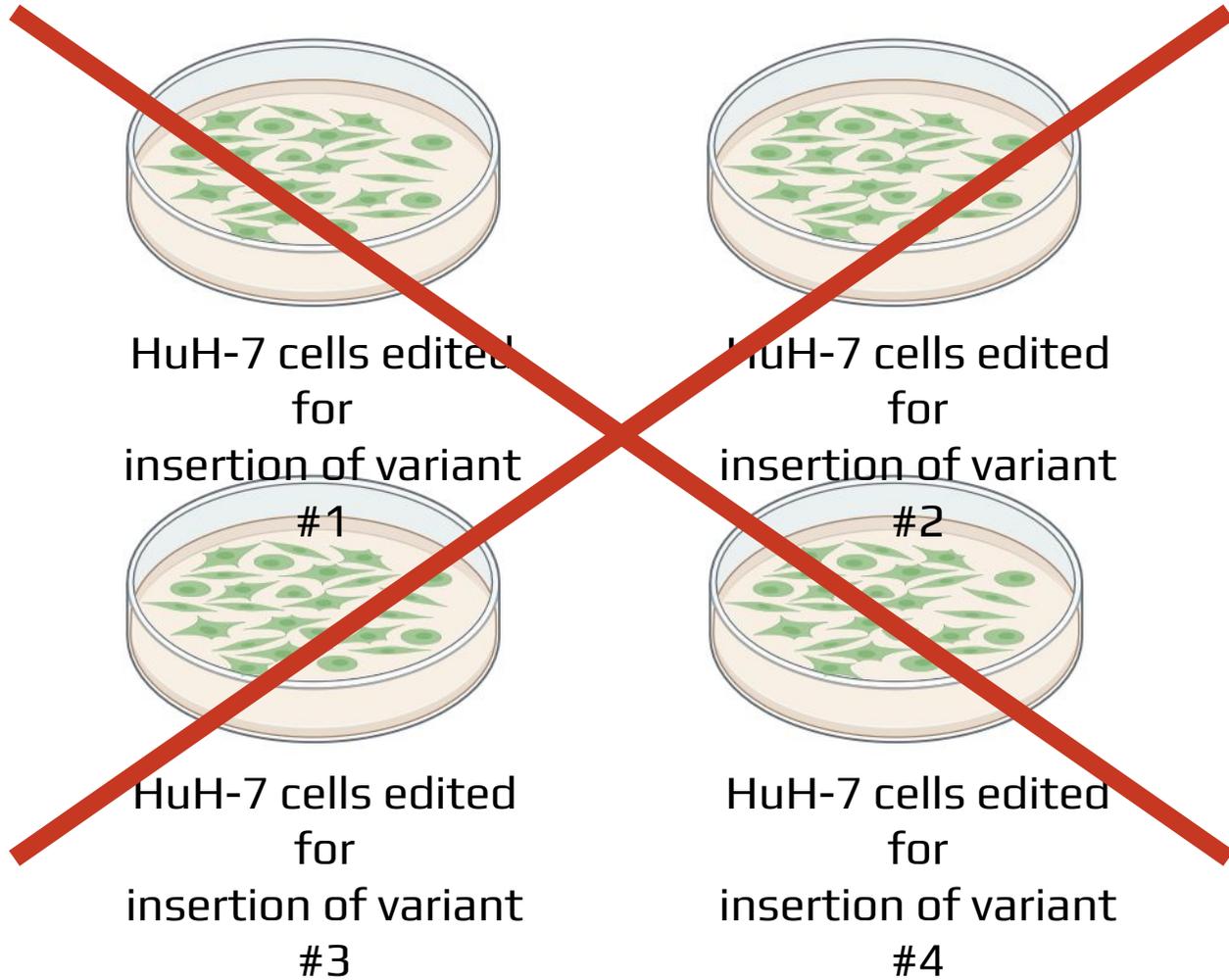


HuH-7 cells edited  
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#4

# Rapid, standardized screening for corrective editing in cells



# Rapid, standardized screening for corrective editing in cells



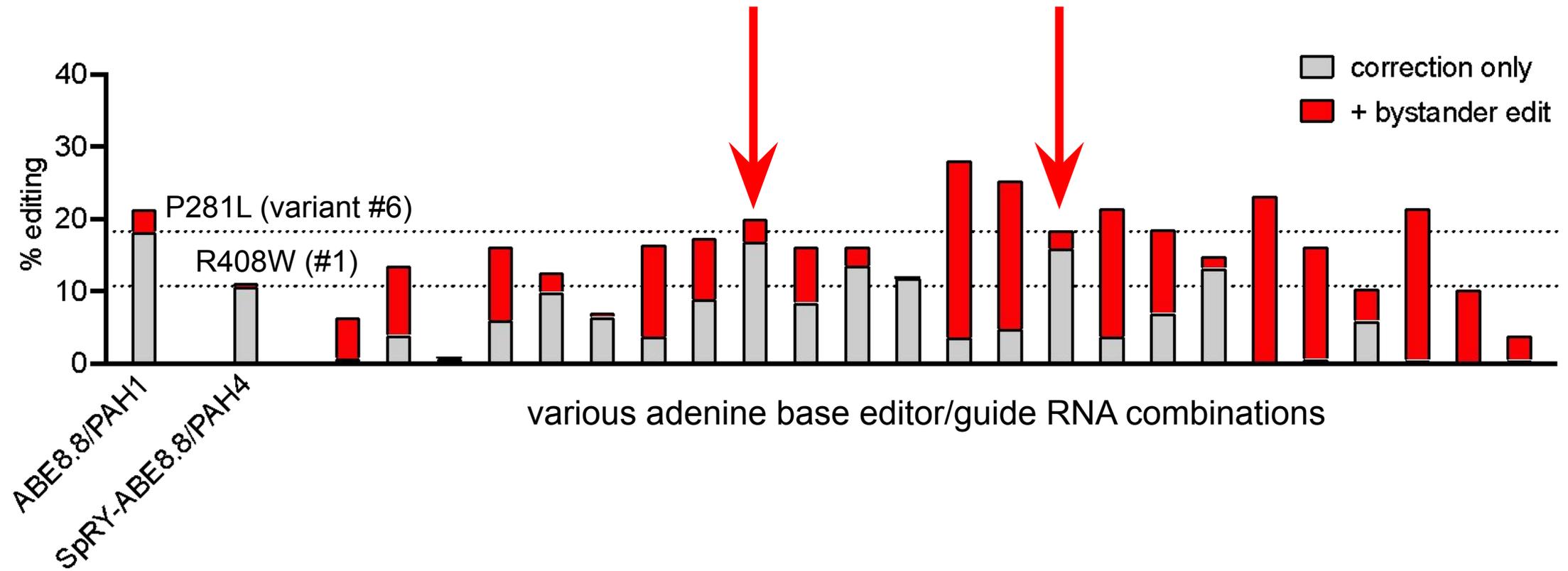
# Base editing to correct another *PAH* variant in HuH-7 cells

variant #2 = c.1066-11G>A



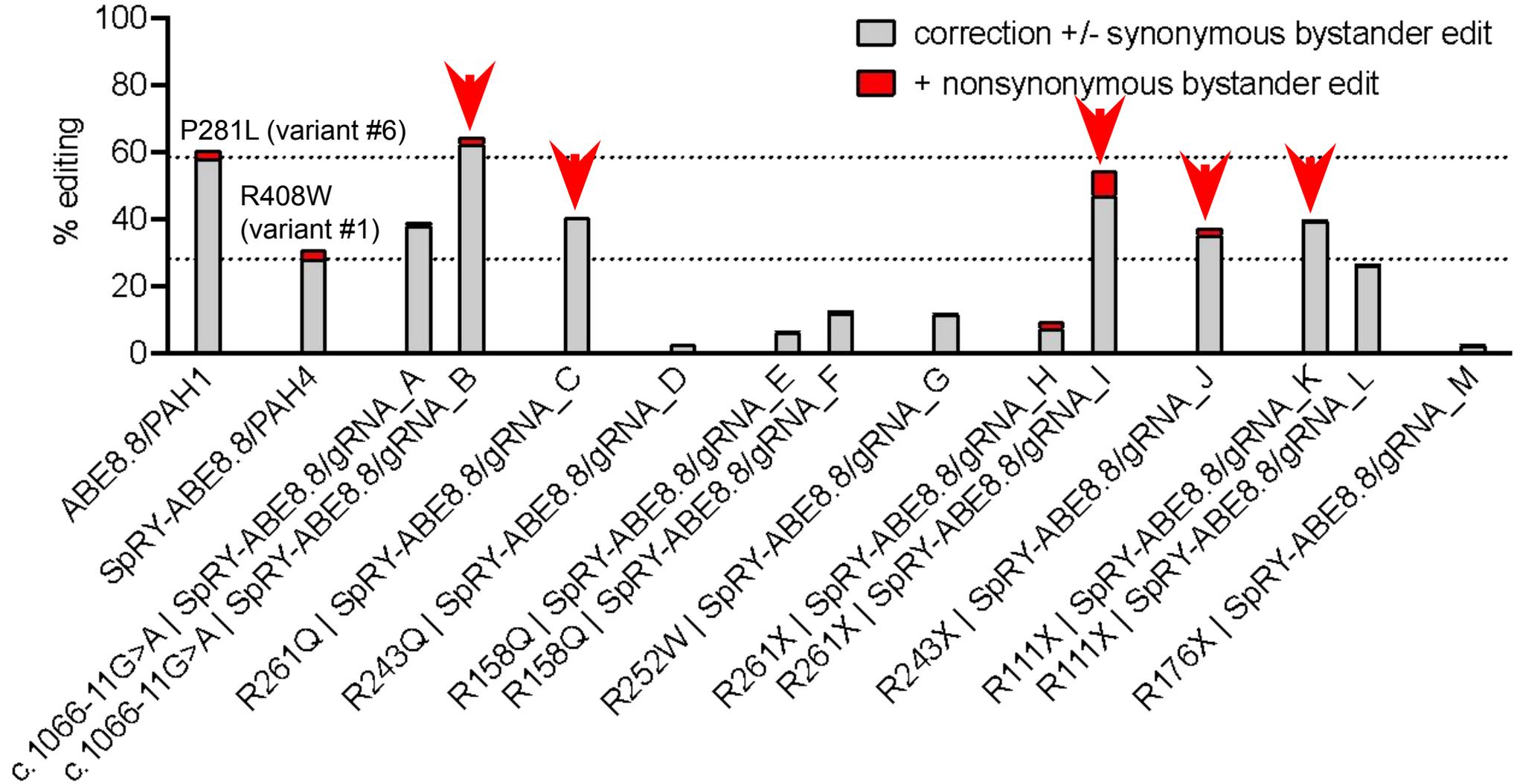
# Base editing to correct another *PAH* variant in HuH-7 cells

variant #2 = c.1066-11G>A editor = SpRY-ABE8.8



# Screening with **SpRY-ABE8.8 mRNA** + guide RNAs in HuH-7 cells

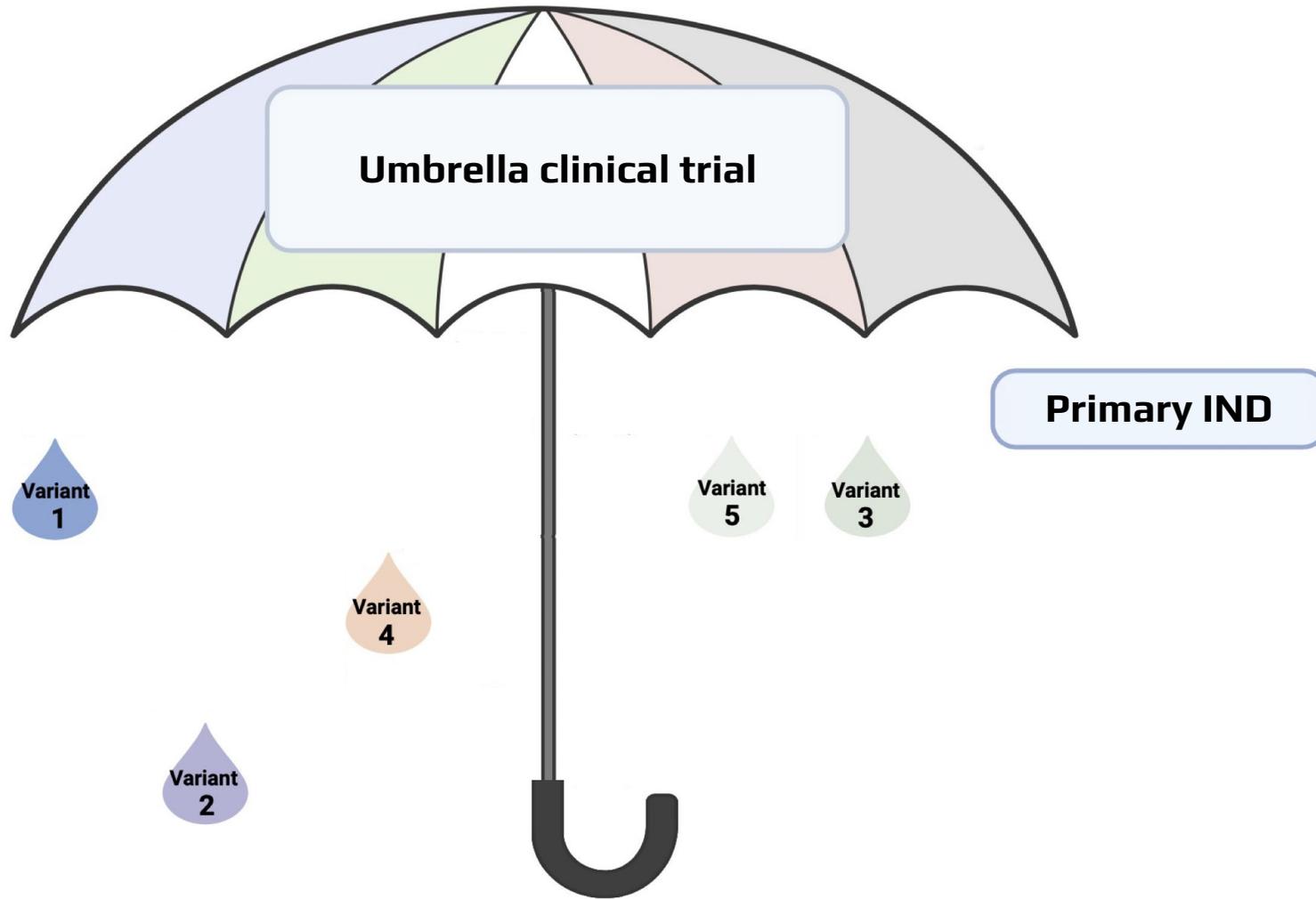
lentivirus-transduced HuH-7 cells - mRNA/gRNA transfections for correction of *PAH* variants



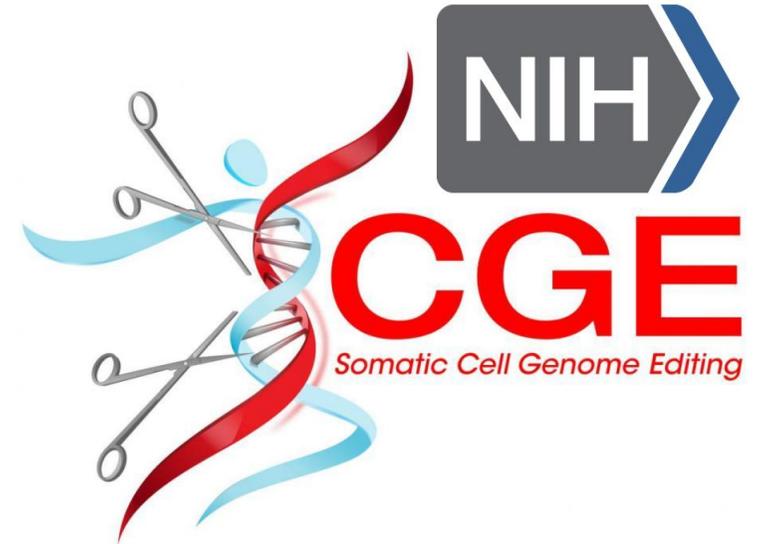
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<b>0.5%</b>			

# Umbrella clinical trial for PKU



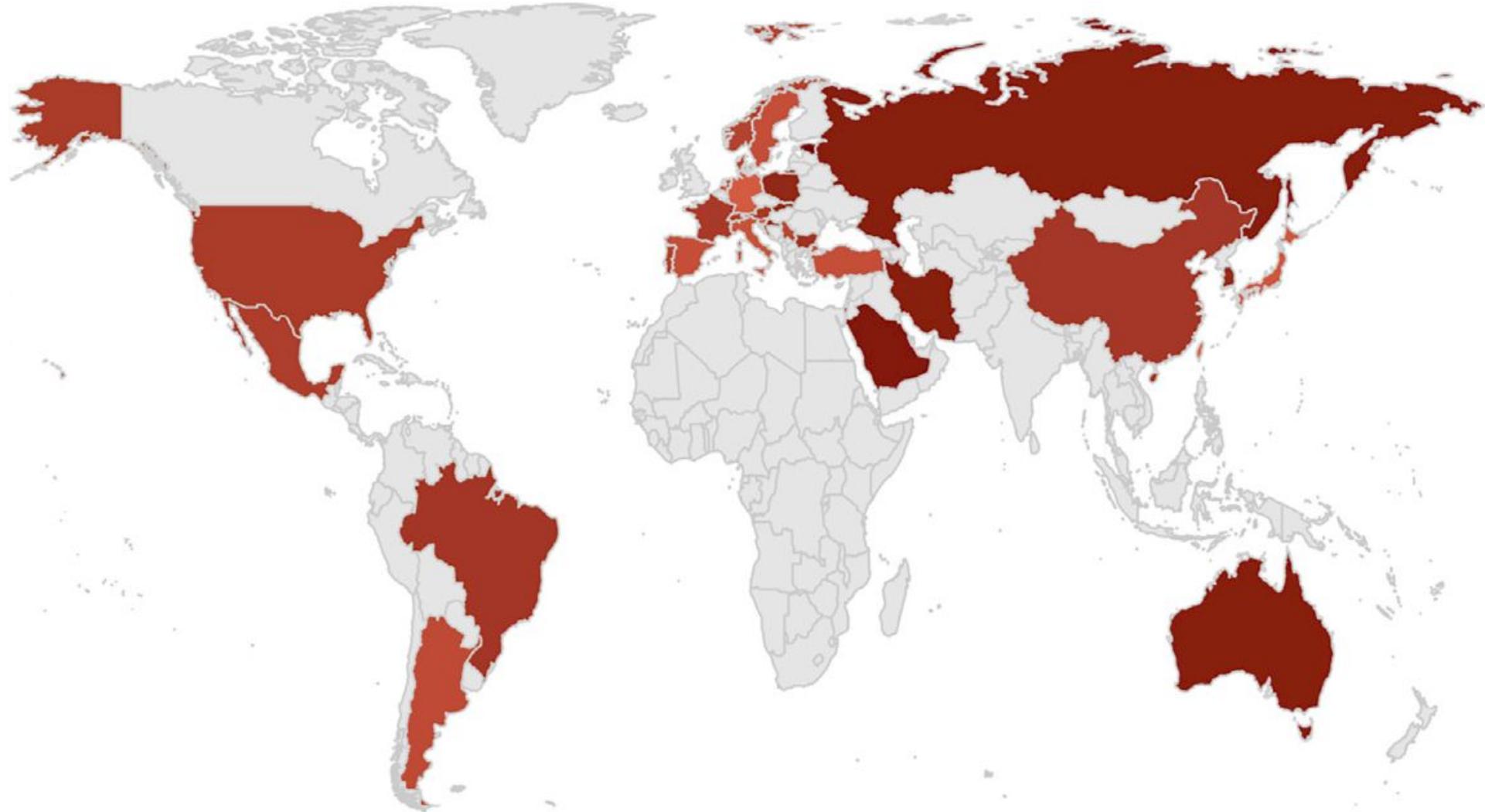
Rebecca Ahrens-Nicklas  
Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP)



## Pathogenic variants in PKU patients

- What about the other 1,000+ cataloged variants?

# Pathogenic variants in PKU patients



## Pathogenic genes and variants

- What about uncataloged variants in low- and middle-income countries without capacity for genetic testing?
- Enormous potential for inequity – drug development biased to certain genes and certain frequent variants in high-income countries?
- **Mutational discrimination**

## How to mitigate mutational discrimination?

~~Focus on most frequent variants in well-studied diseases with larger commercial opportunities~~

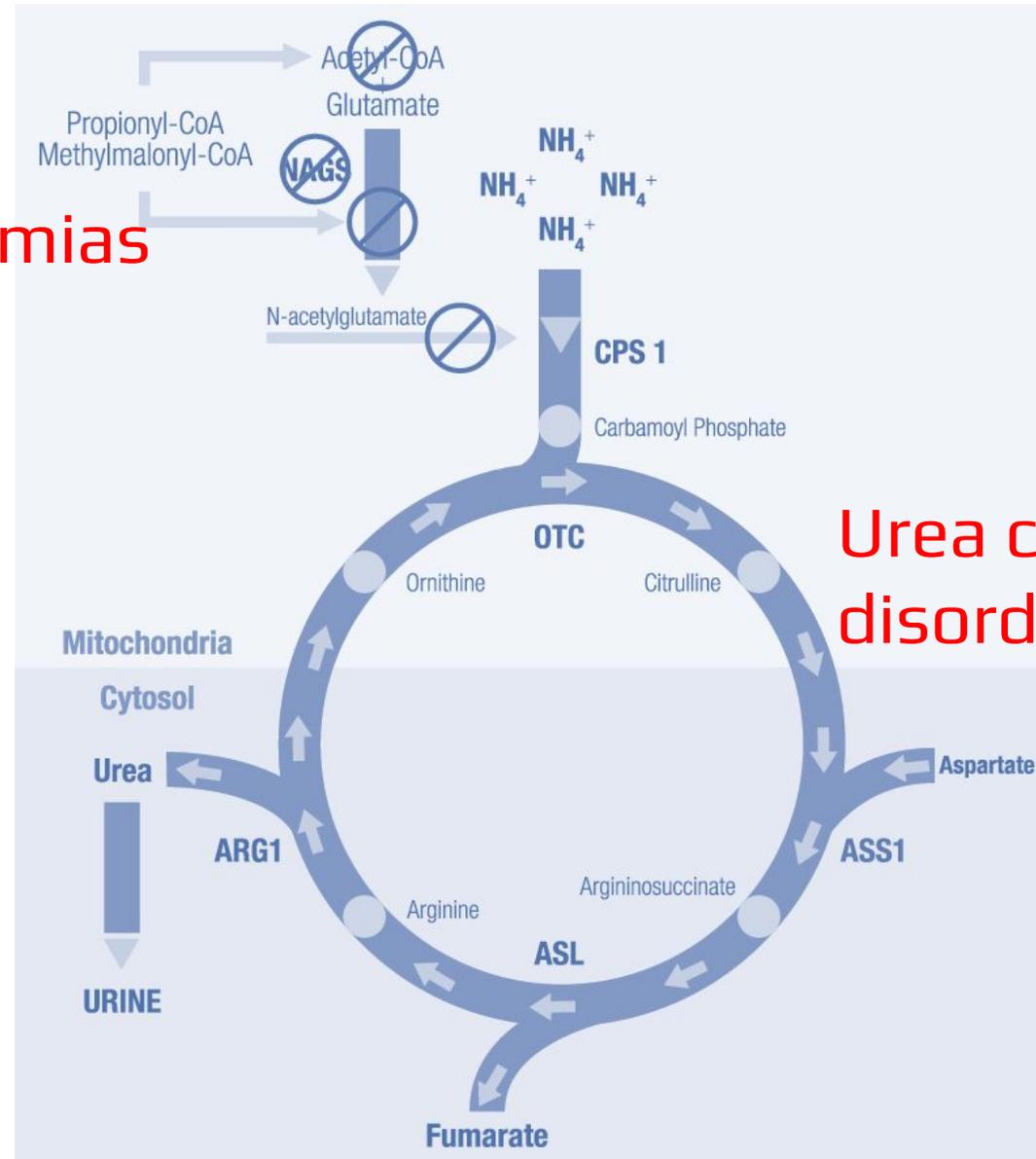
Make personalized gene editing therapies for all comers, no matter how rare the disease and how rare the variant (even *N*-of-1)

# Newborn patients with grievous inborn errors of metabolism

## Organic acidemias

Hyperammonemia episodes, starting immediately after birth, cause **progressive brain damage** and **early death**

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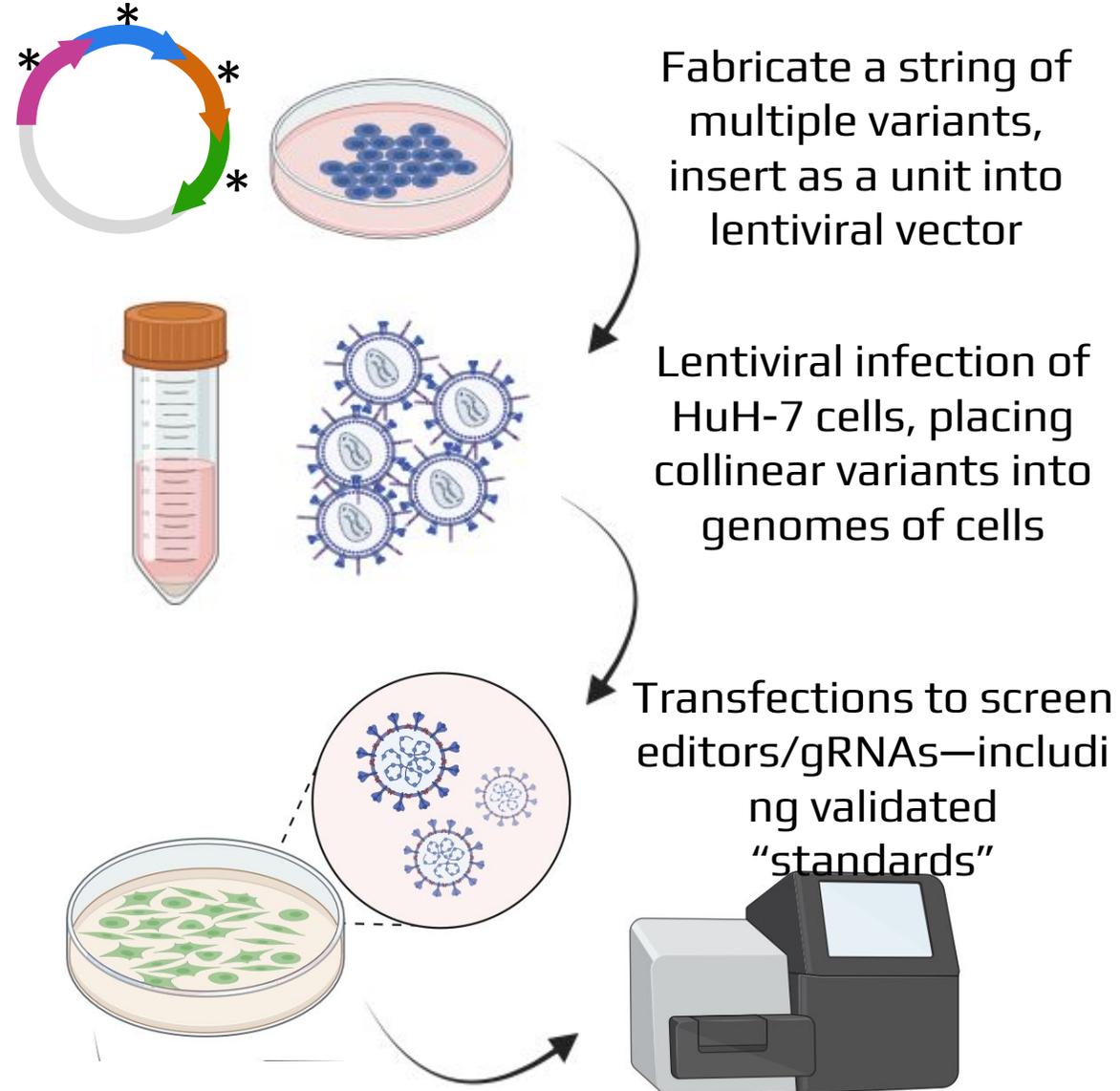
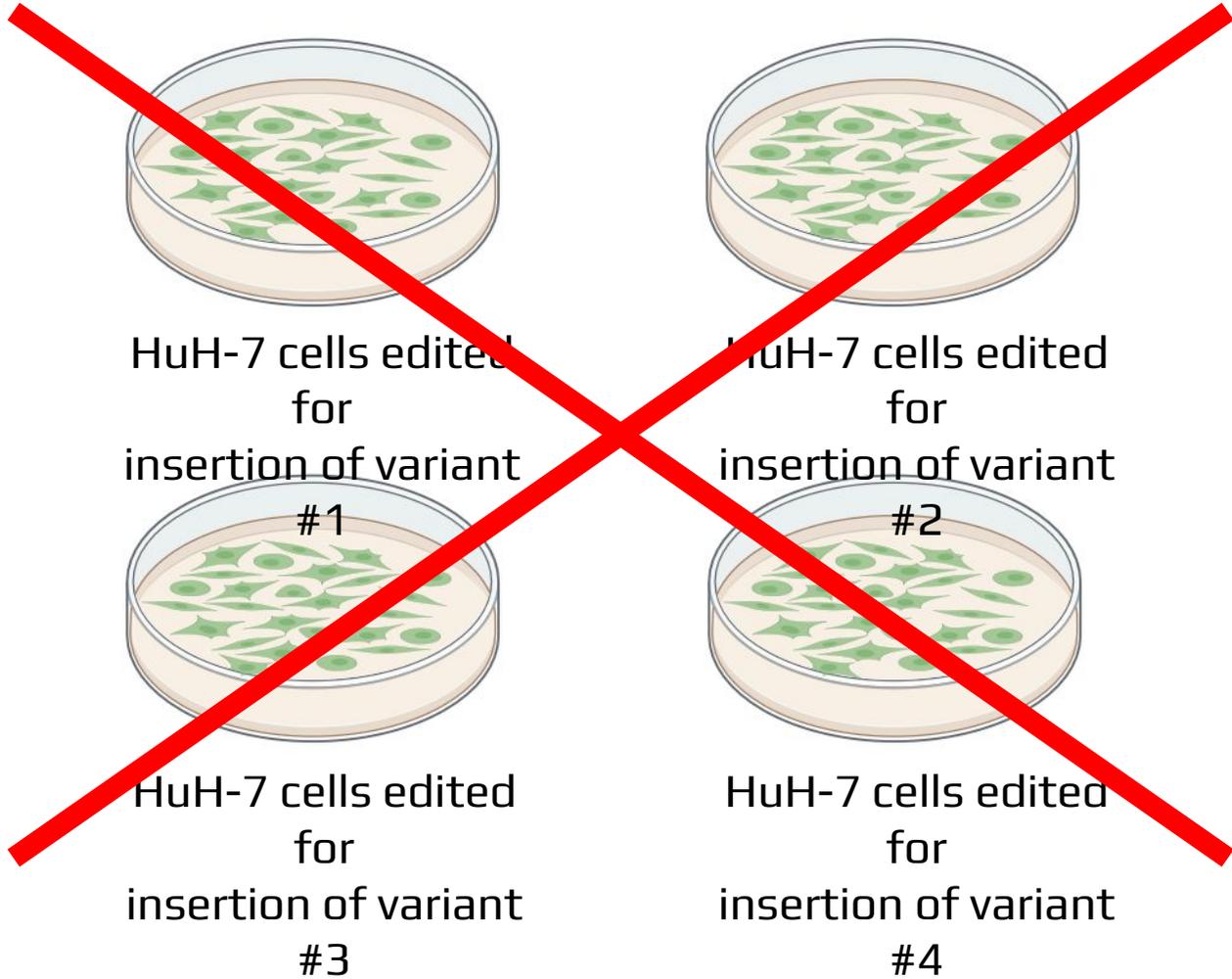
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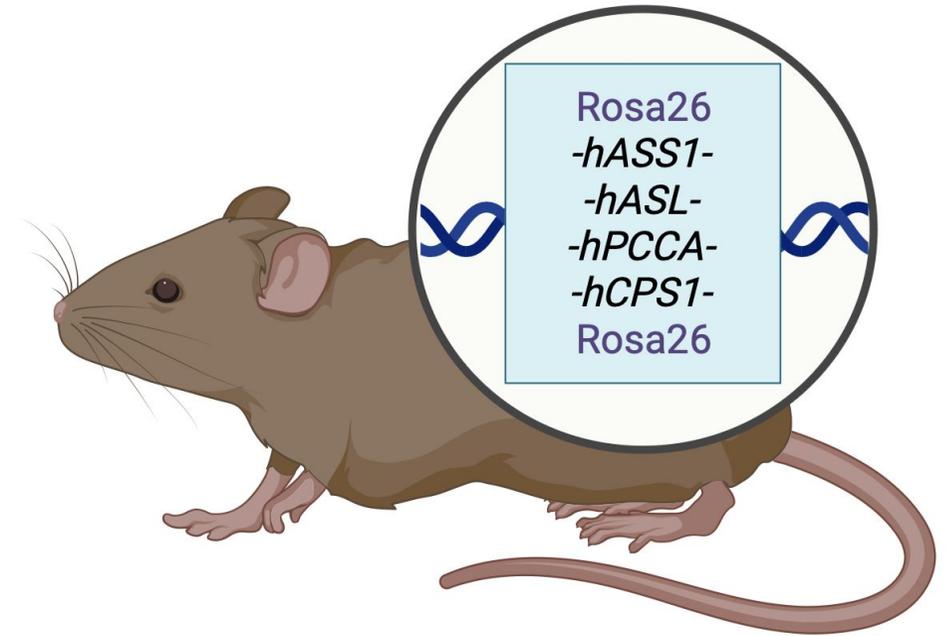
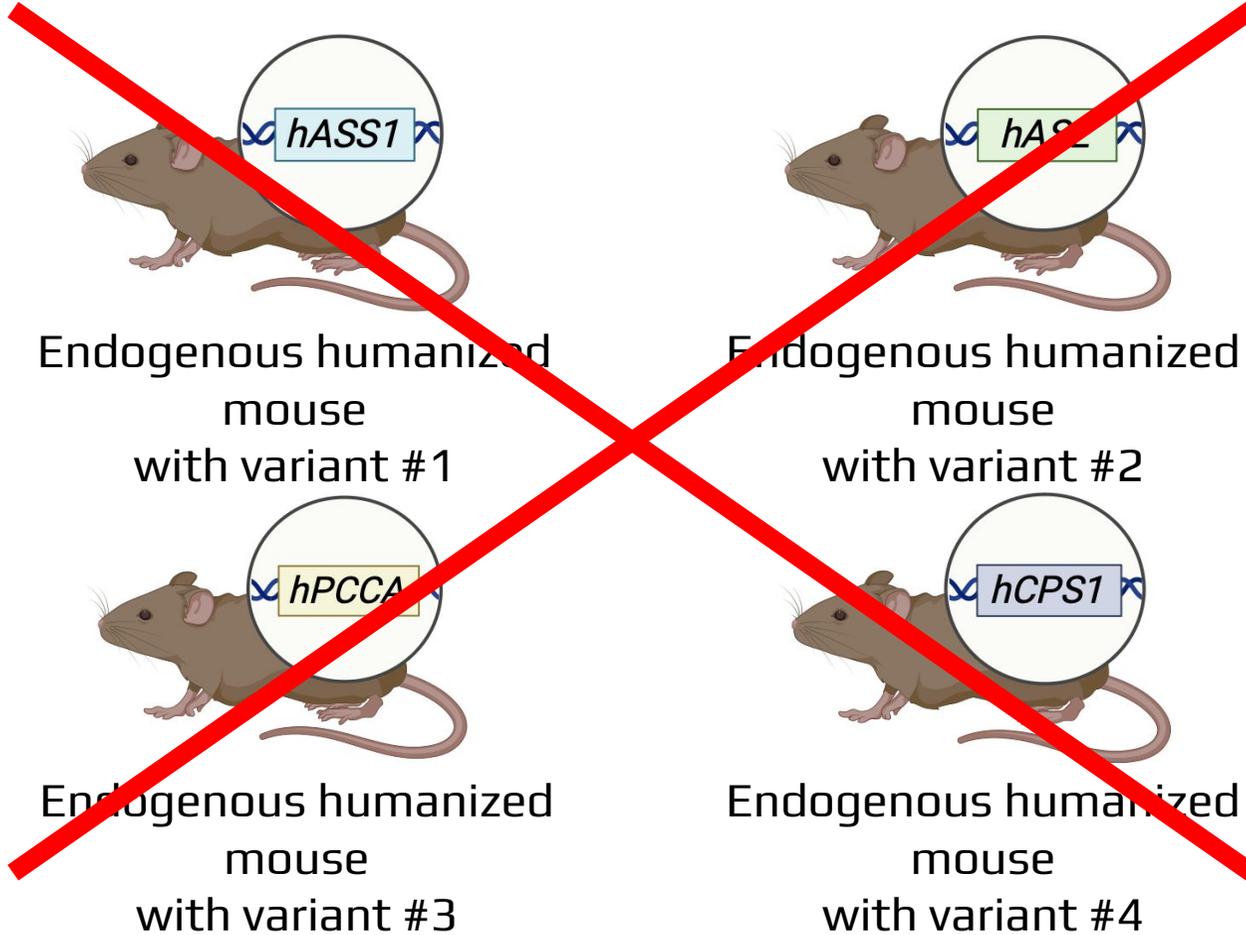
# Variants causing urea cycle disorders and organic acidemias

- citrullinemia type 1 = *ASS1* variants
- argininosuccinic aciduria = *ASL* variants
- CPS1 deficiency = *CPS1* variants
- OTC deficiency = *OTC* variants
- propionic acidemia = *PCCA* or *PCCB* variants
- methylmalonic acidemia = *MMUT* or *MMAB* variants

# Rapid, standardized corrective editing in cells



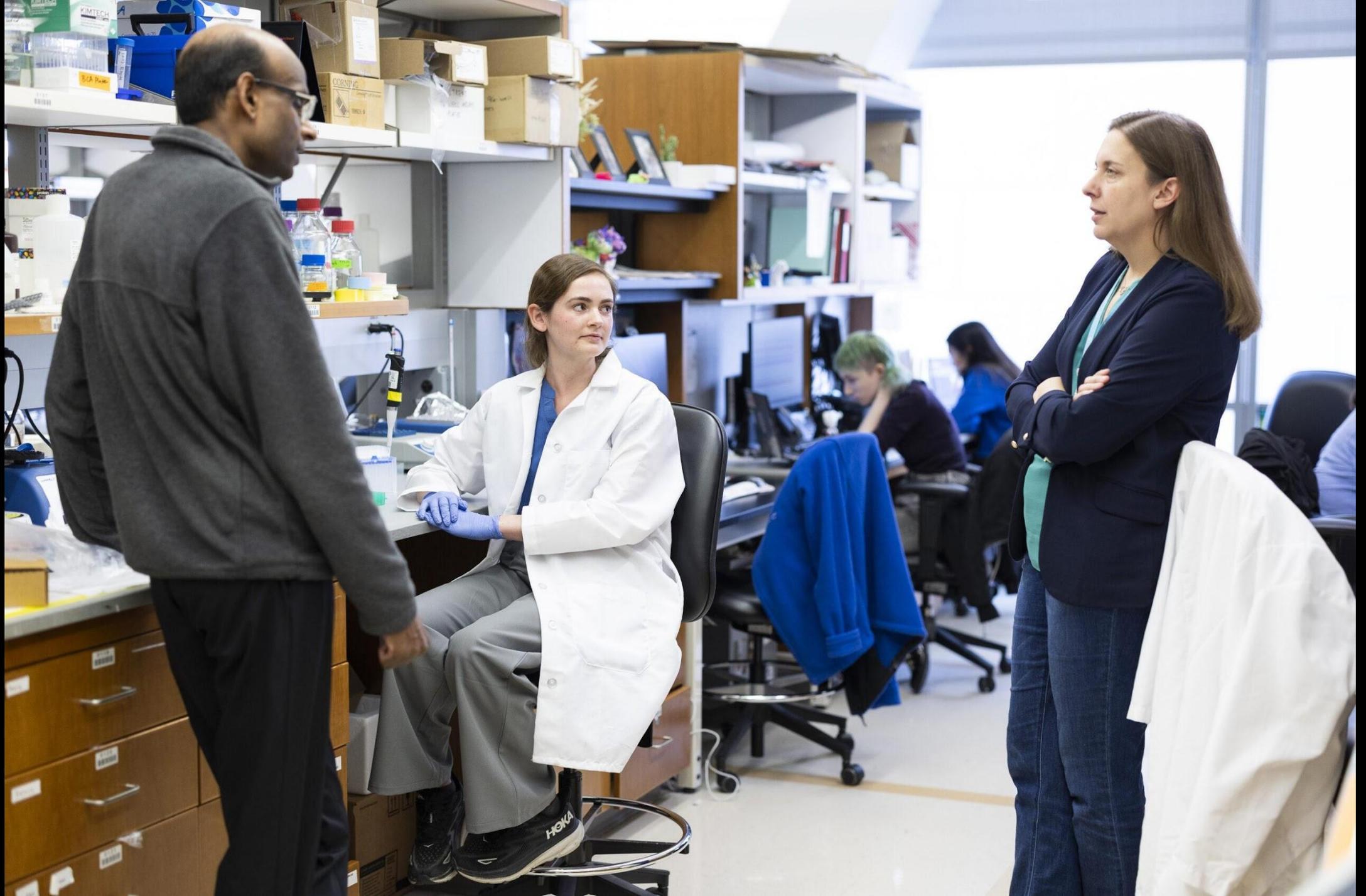
# Rapid generation of mice for testing *in vivo* corrective editing



*Rosa26* safe harbor with all variants  
= multi-variant mouse

# Variants causing urea cycle disorders and organic acidemias

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- propionic acidemia = *PCCA* or *PCCB* variants
- methylmalonic acidemia = *MMUT* or *MMAB* variants
- newborn case



# New case of neonatal-onset urea cycle disorder

A 2-day-old male infant, named KJ, became lethargic and had respiratory distress.

The **blood ammonia level** was significantly elevated **>1000  $\mu\text{mol/L}$**  (normal for age is  $<33 \mu\text{mol/L}$ ).

He was transferred to the **neonatal intensive care unit** and rapidly started on life-saving dialysis.



# Genetic diagnosis

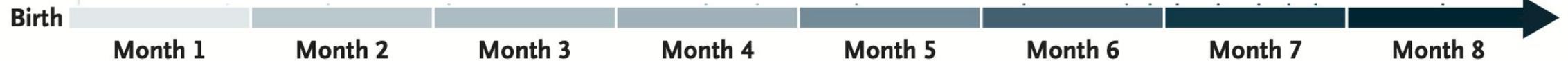
Genetic  
diagnosis

Metabolic testing confirmed a proximal urea cycle defect.

Rapid genome sequencing identified compound heterozygous *CPS1* variants:

*CPS1* c.1003C>T (Q335X) / c.2140G>T (E714X)

KJ was diagnosed with **CPS1 deficiency**, the worst of the urea cycle disorders.



# Genetic diagnosis

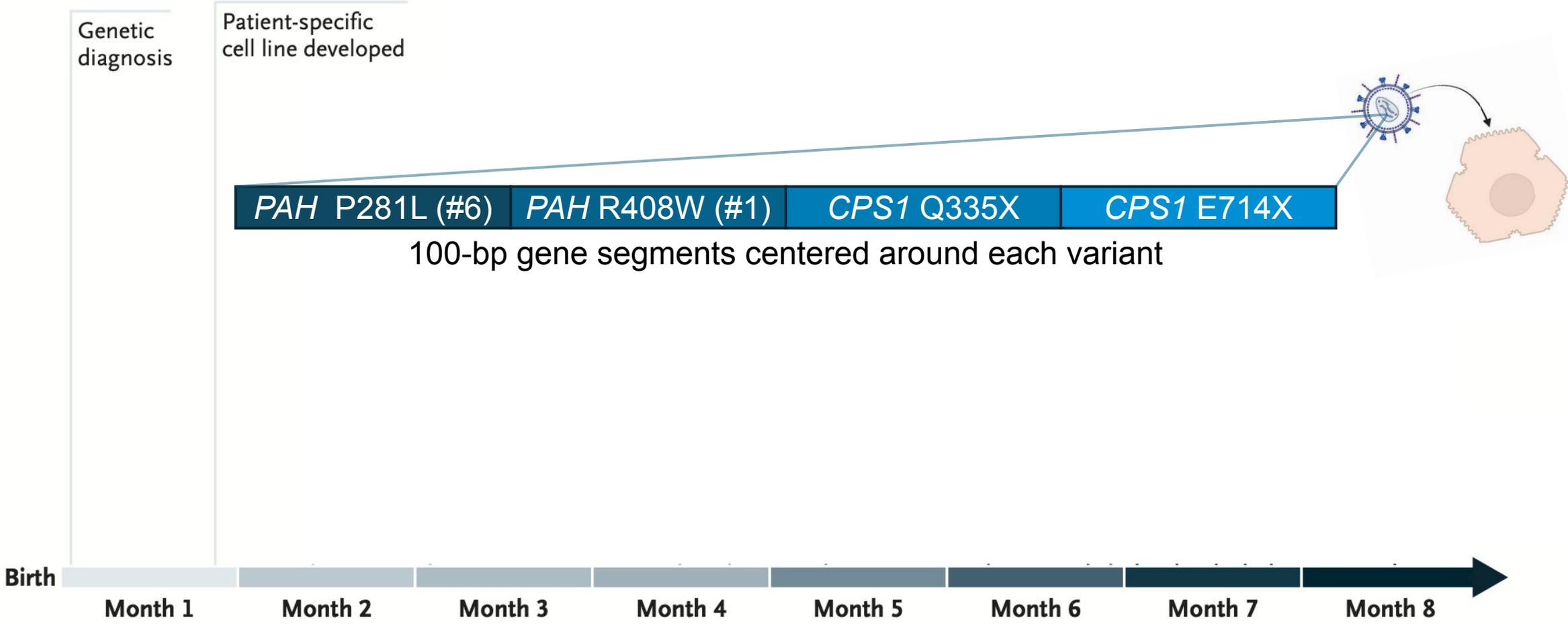
Genetic diagnosis

KJ was transitioned to chronic urea cycle disorder management:

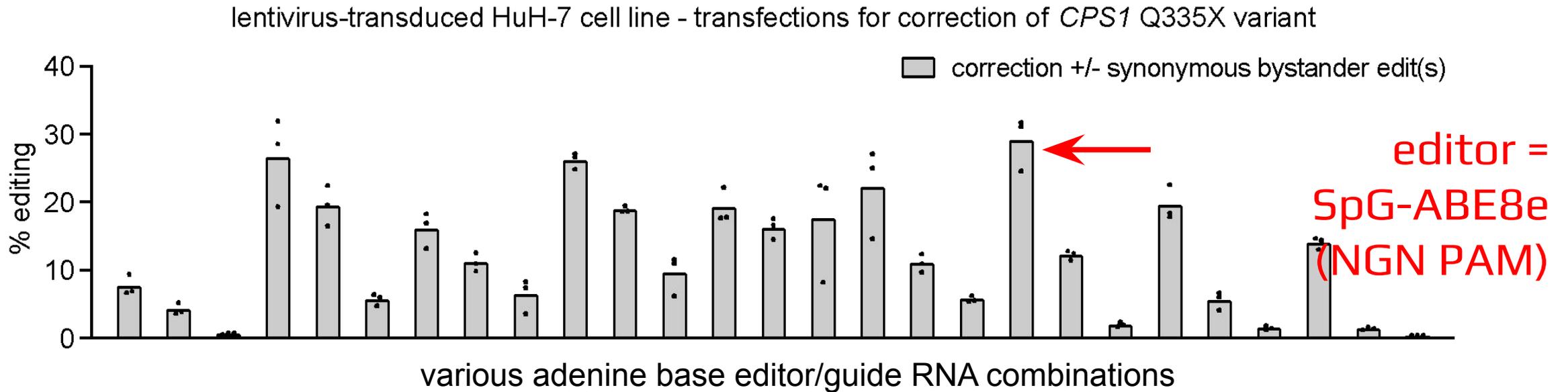
- Protein-restricted diet
- Nitrogen scavenger medications
- Citrulline supplementation
- Plan to remain admitted to hospital indefinitely for close monitoring, awaiting liver transplantation (typically  $\geq 1$  year of age)



# Screening of base editors for correction of *CPS1* Q335X variant



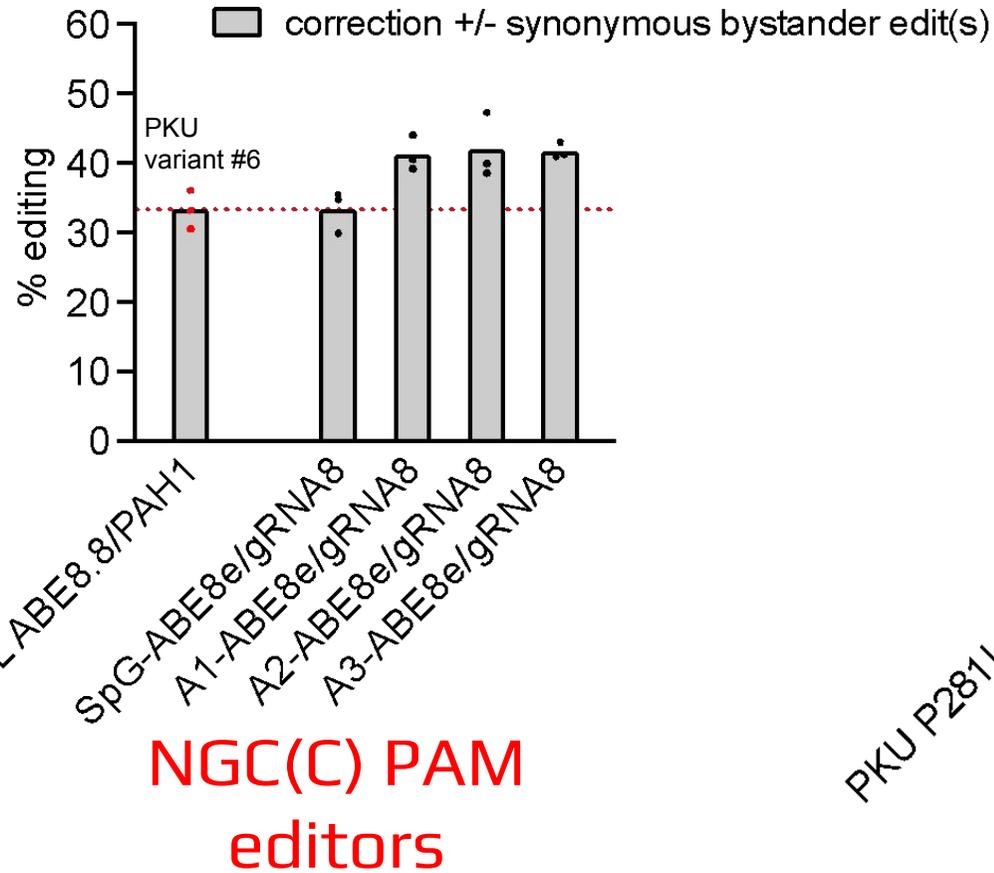
# Screening of base editors for correction of *CPS1* Q335X variant



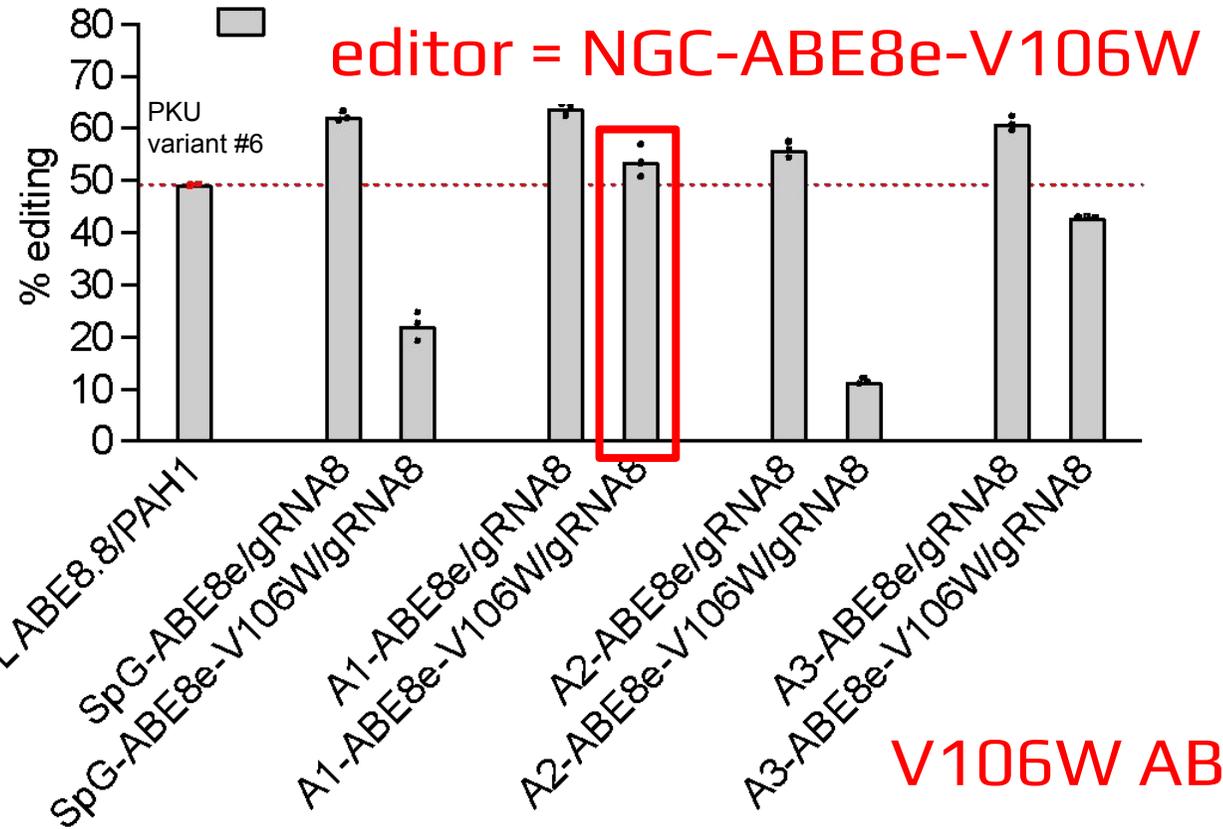
*Results in less than 4 weeks*

# Screening of base editors for correction of *CPS1* Q335X variant

lentivirus-transduced HuH-7 cell line - transfections for correction of *CPS1* Q335X variant

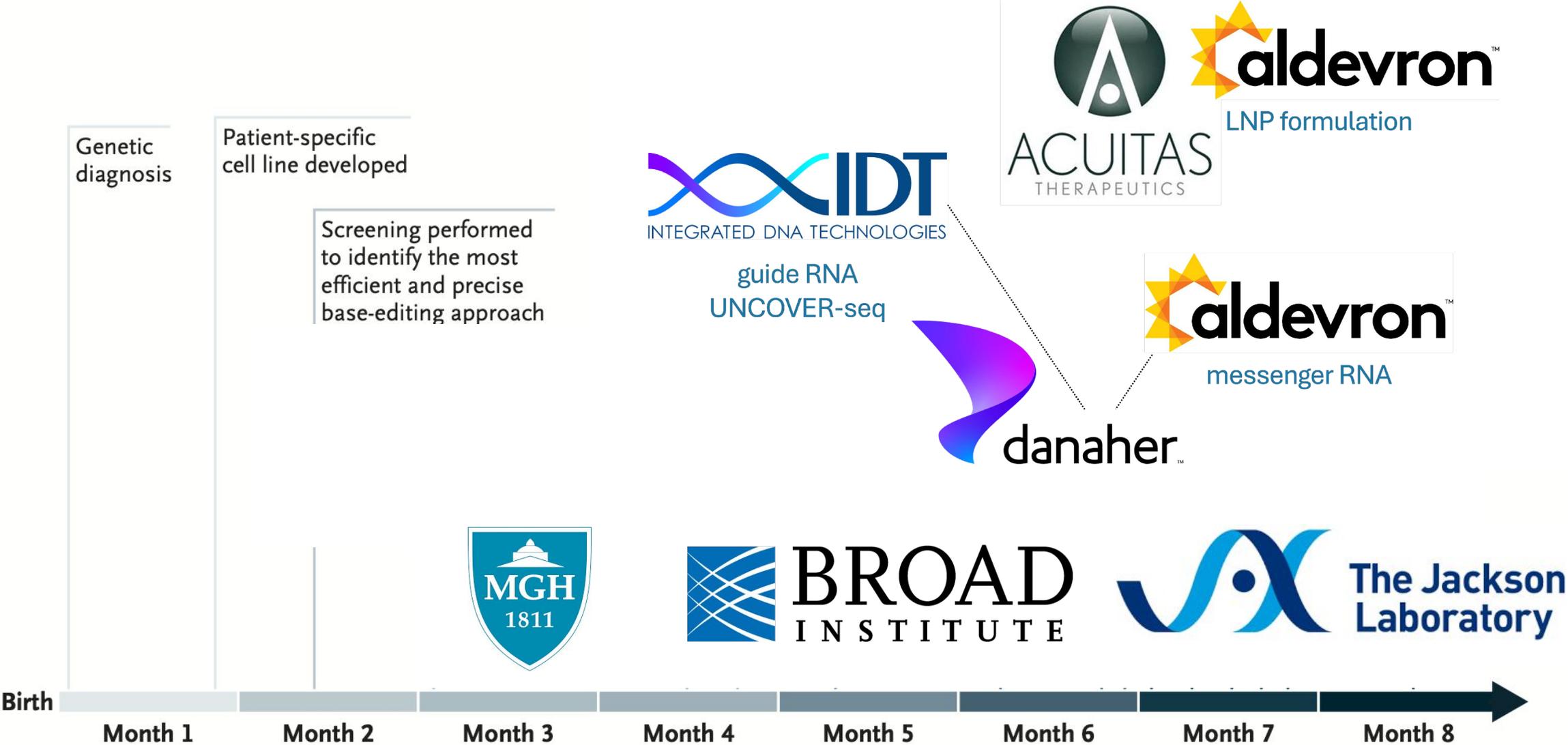


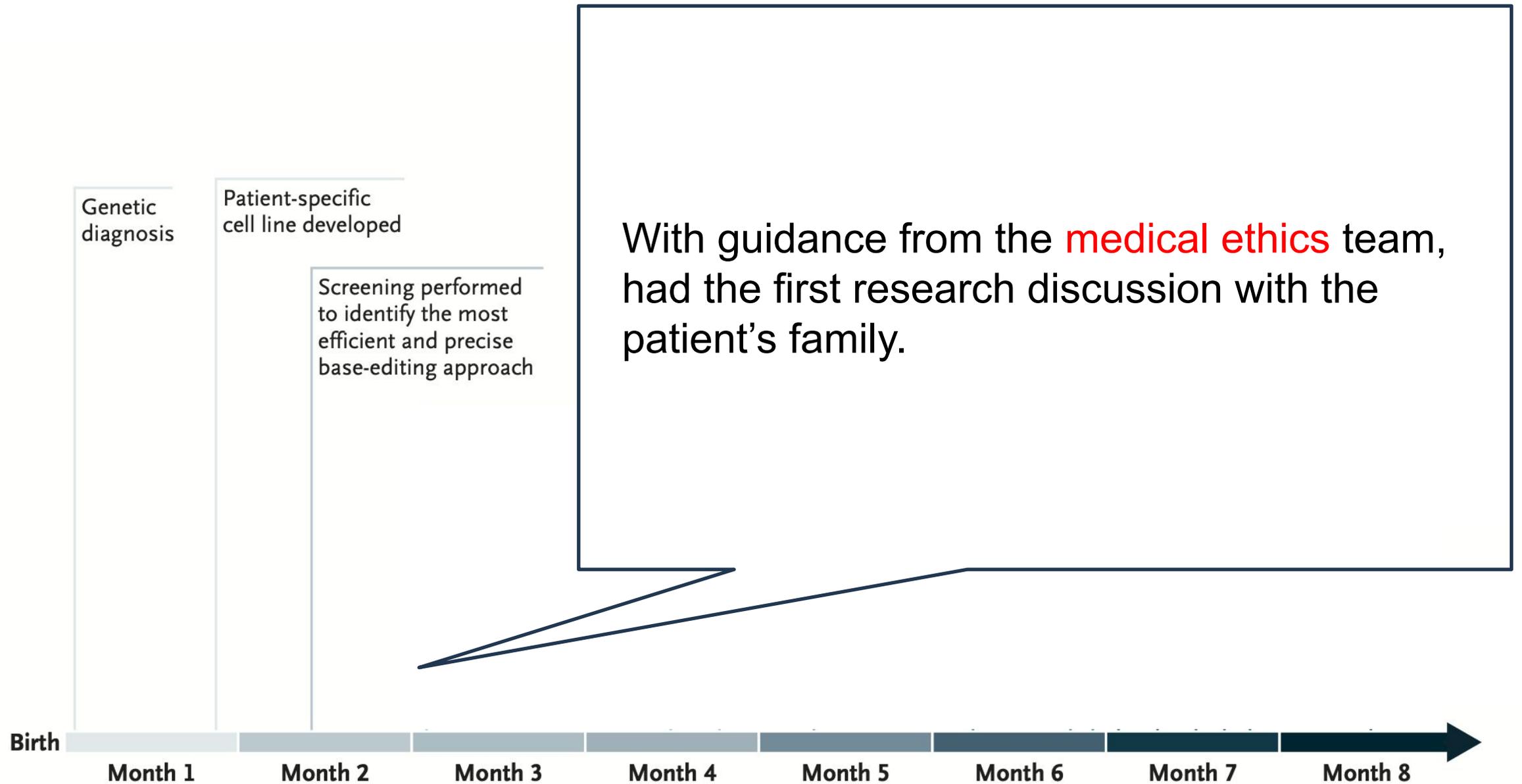
lentivirus-transduced HuH-7 cell line - transfections for correction of *CPS1* Q335X variant

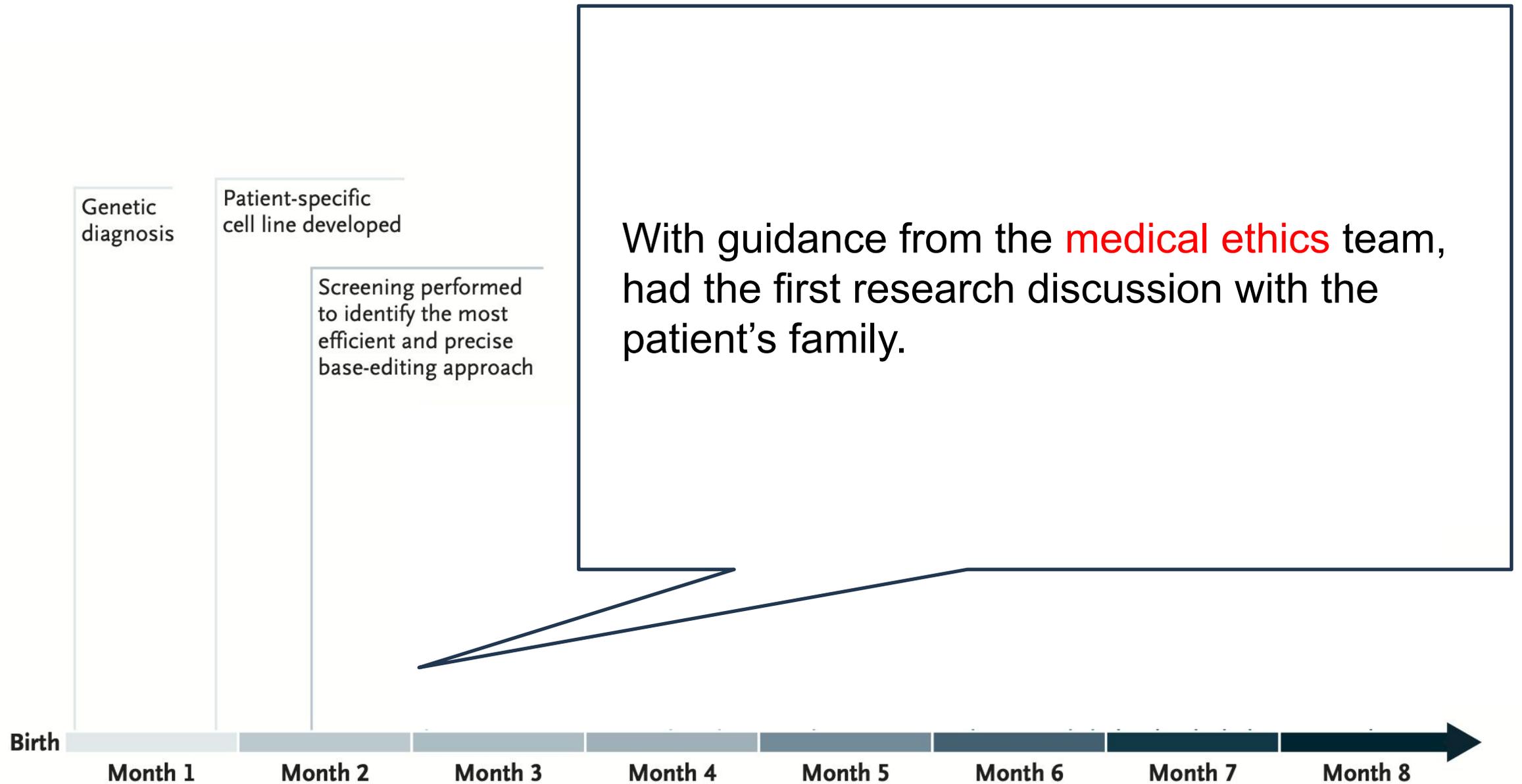


**Completed in 6 weeks**

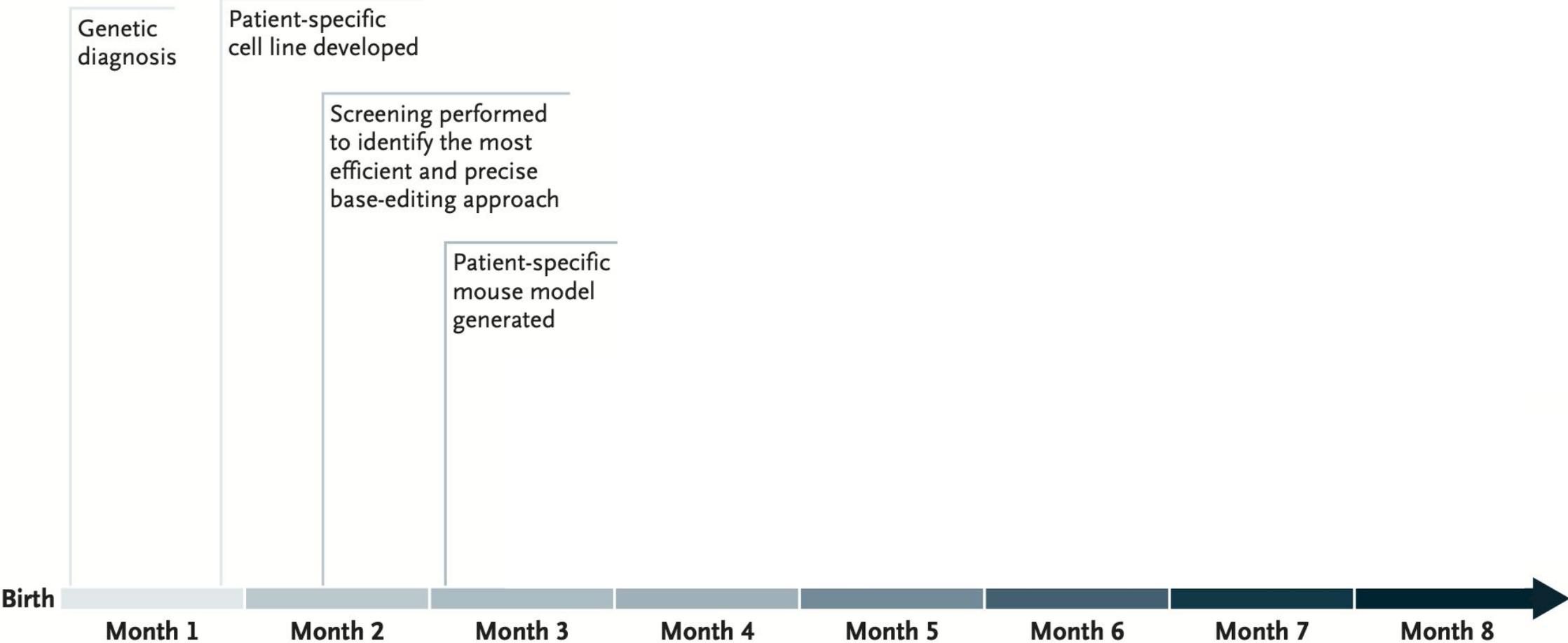
# Assembly of a team of academic and industry partners



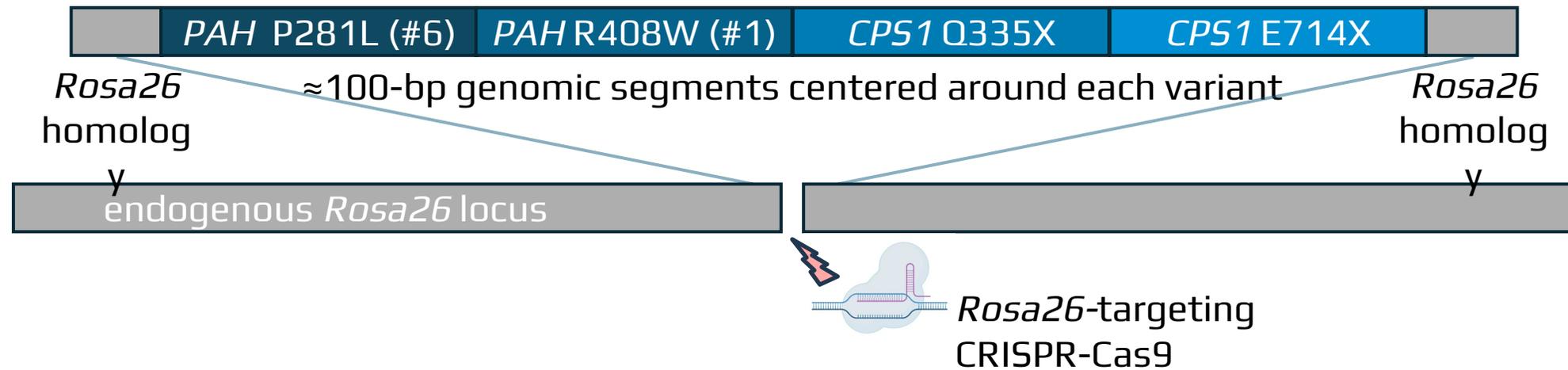




# Generation of patient-specific Q335X mice for *in vivo* testing

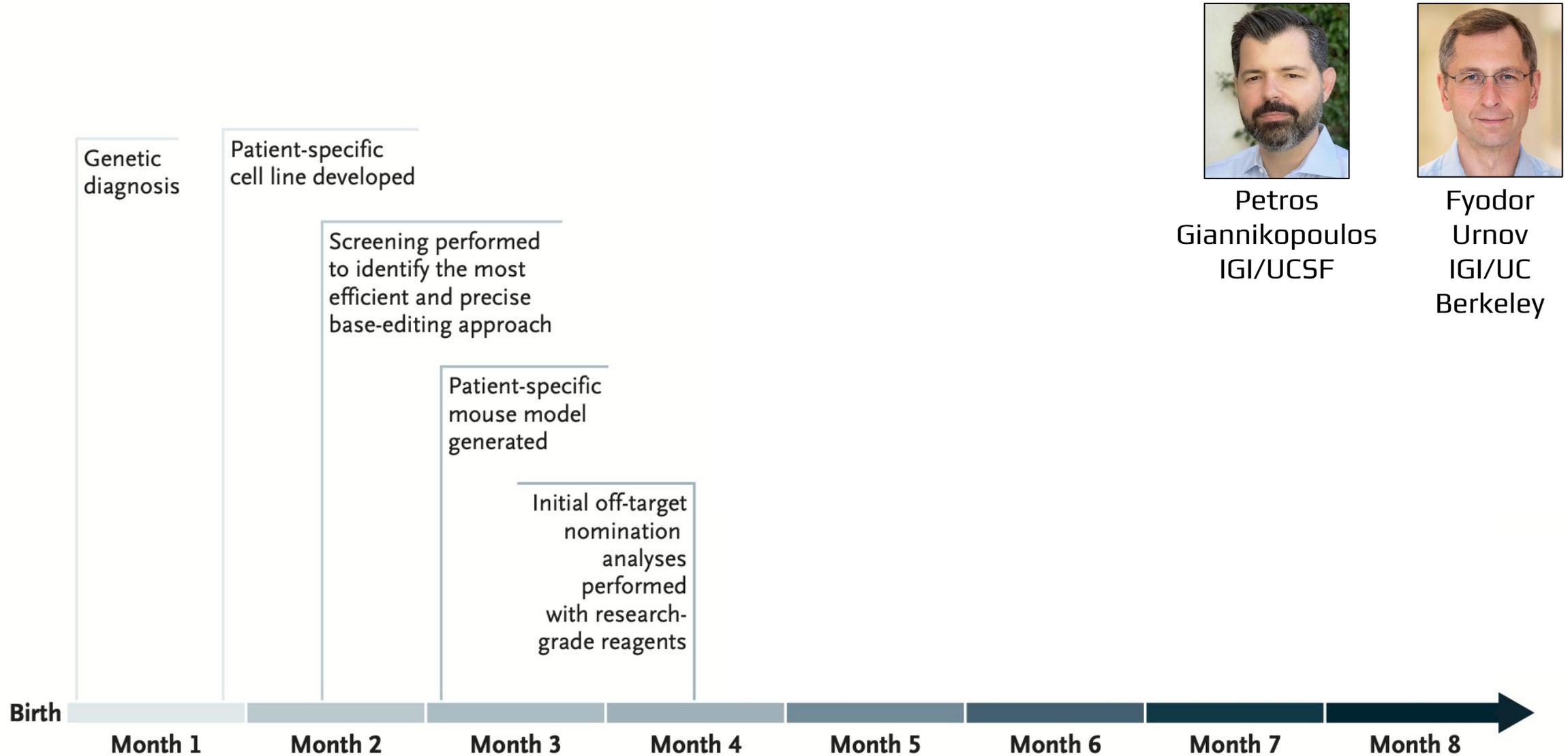


# *Rosa26* multi-variant mice (and endogenous *Cps1*-Q335X mice)

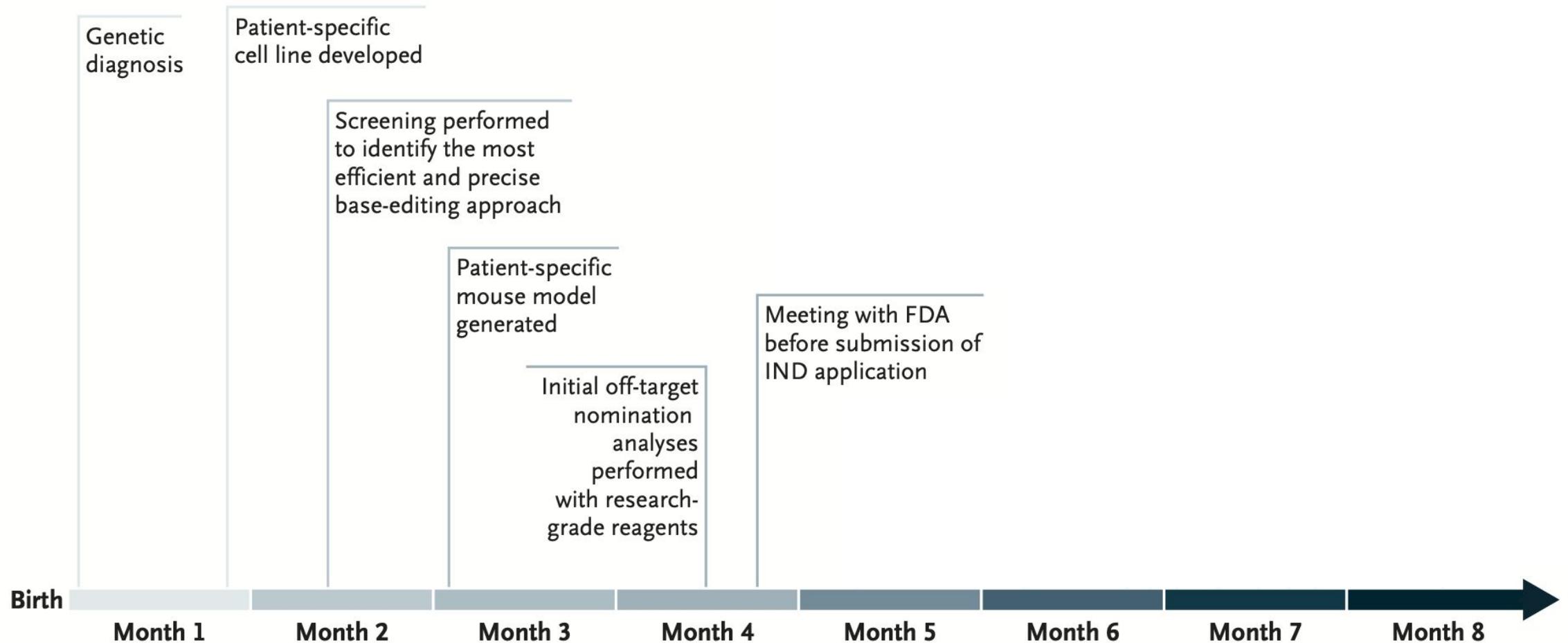


*Obtained two founder Rosa26 multi-variant mice  
(and one founder Cps1-Q335X mouse) in 2 months*

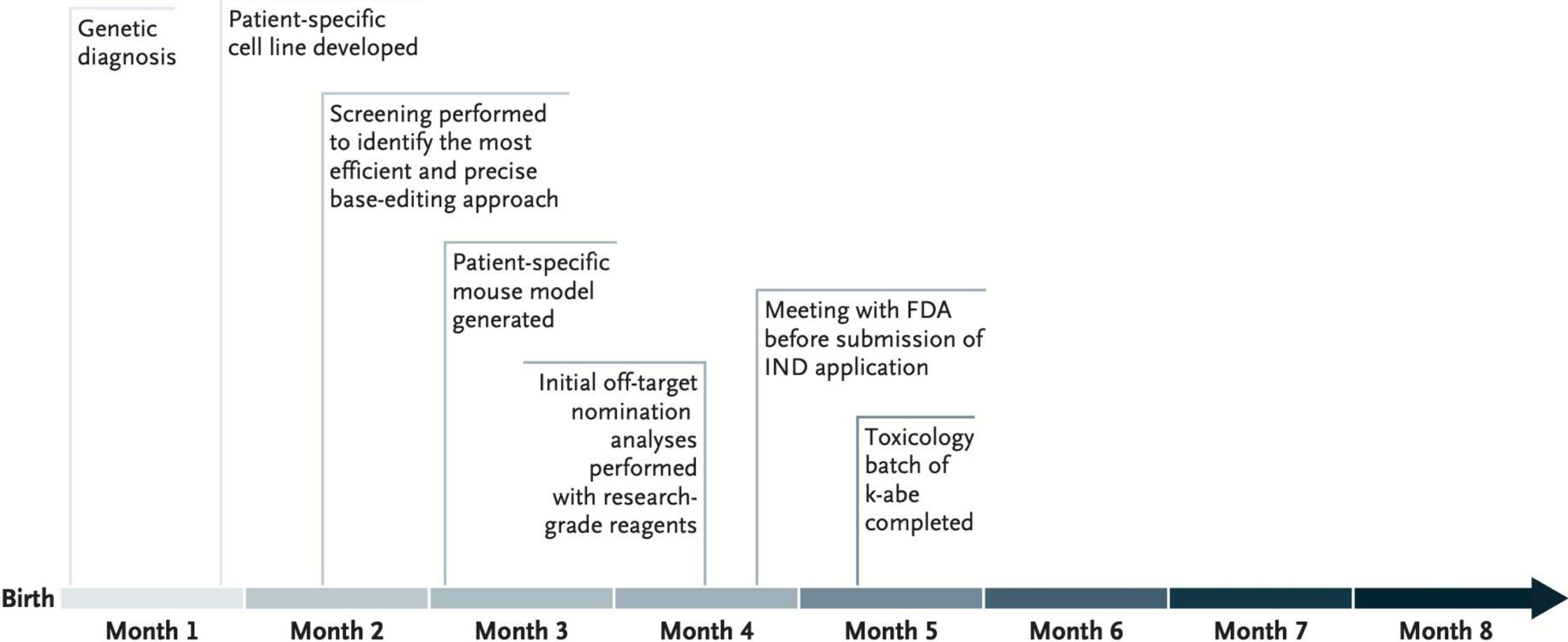
# Initial off-target assessment



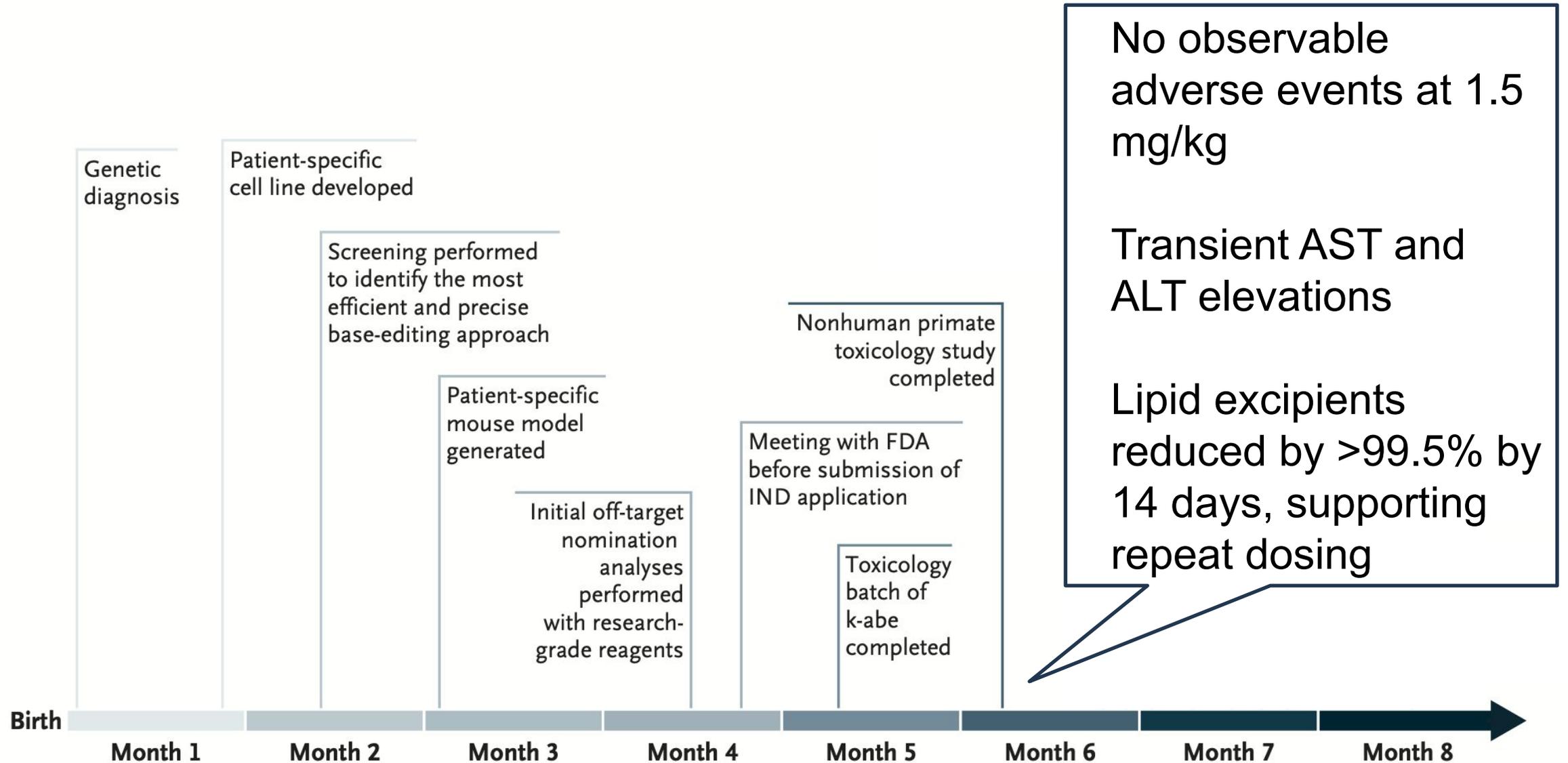
# Pre-IND meeting with U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)



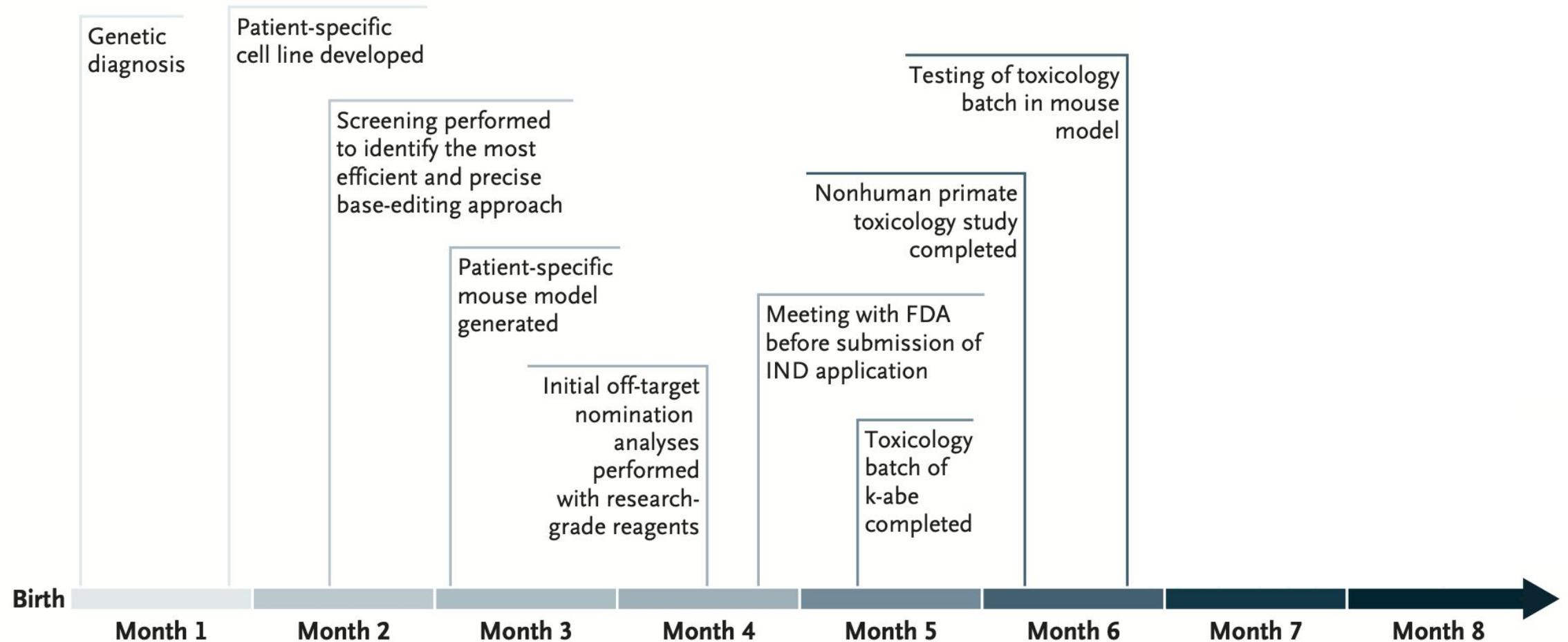
# Toxicology batch of kayjayguran abengcemeran (k-abe)



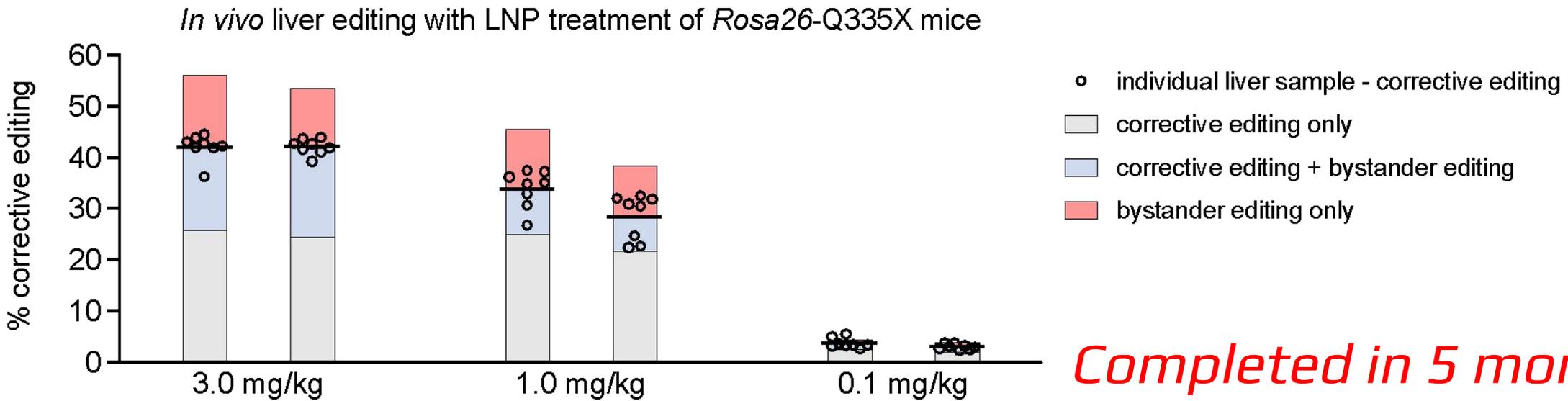
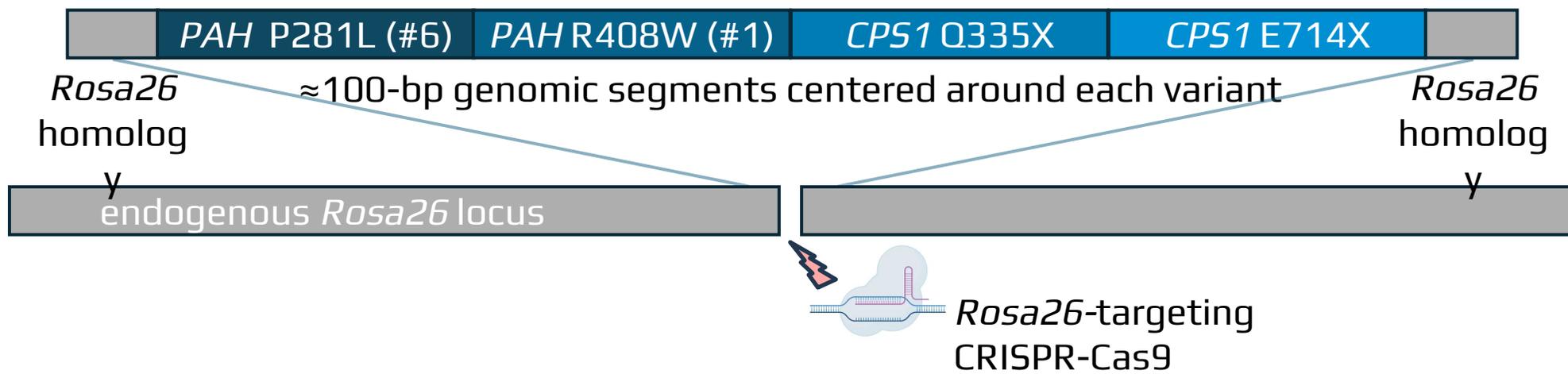
# Nonhuman primate toxicology study



# Testing of toxicology batch of k-abe in *Rosa26* multi-variant mice



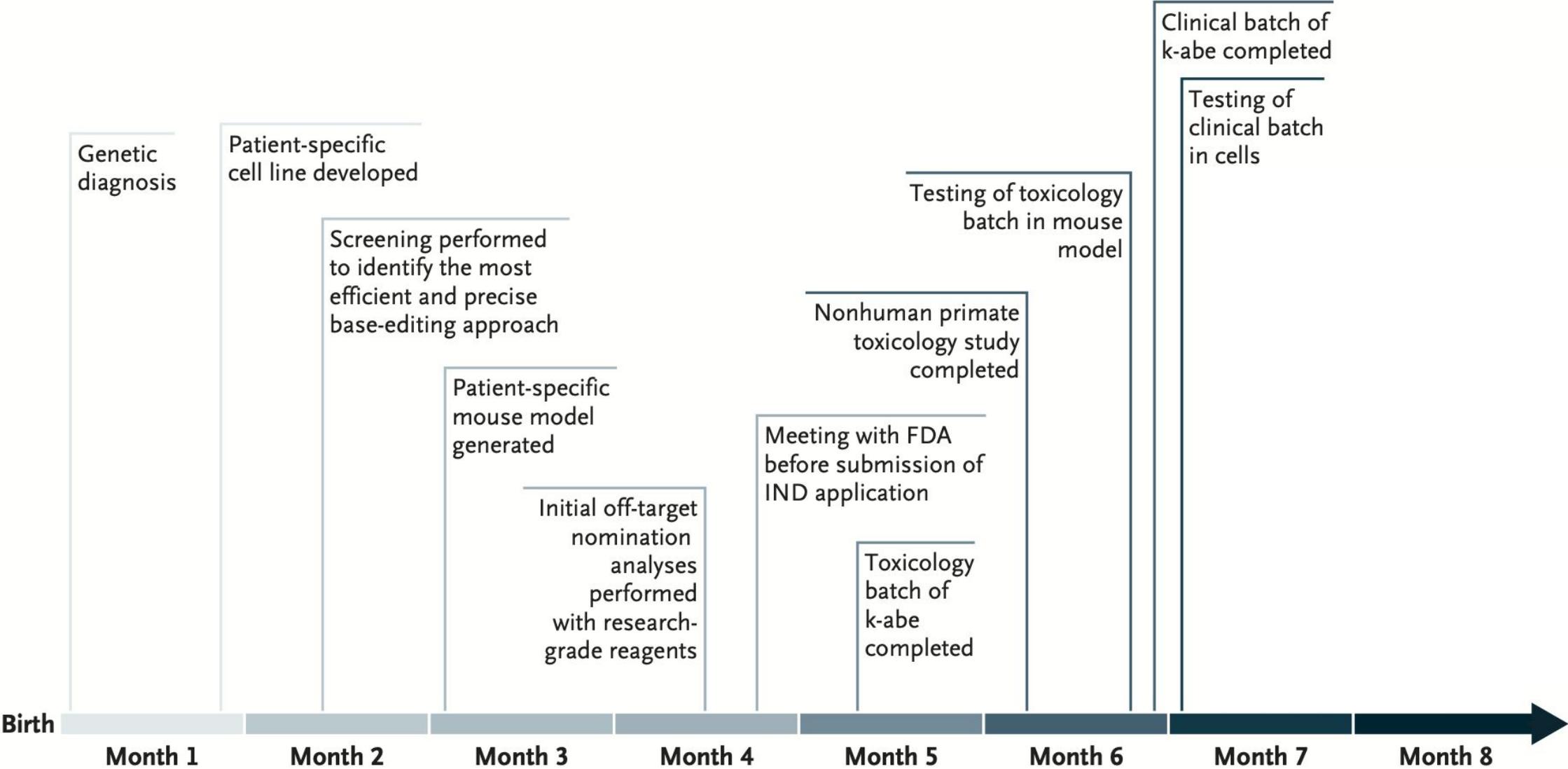
# Correction of *CPS1* Q335X variant in *Rosa26* multi-variant mice



**Completed in 5 months**

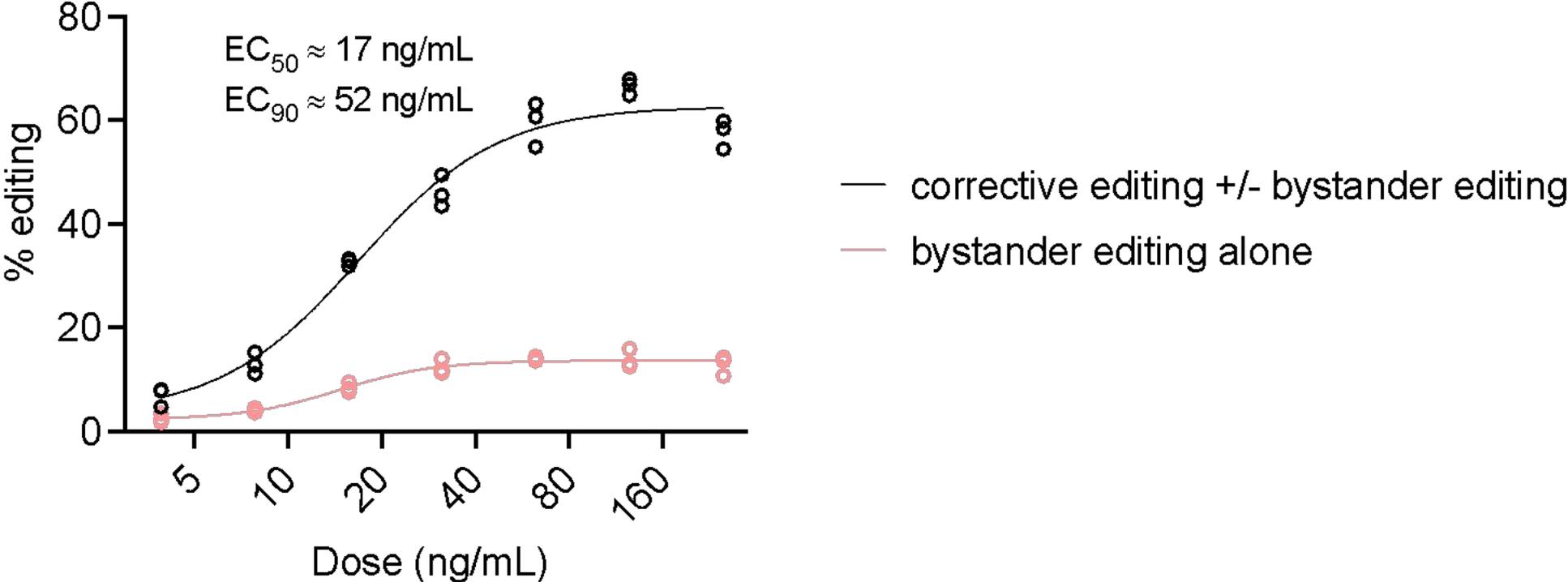
Juvenile mice - retro-orbital injection

# Manufacturing of clinical batch of k-abe and testing in cells

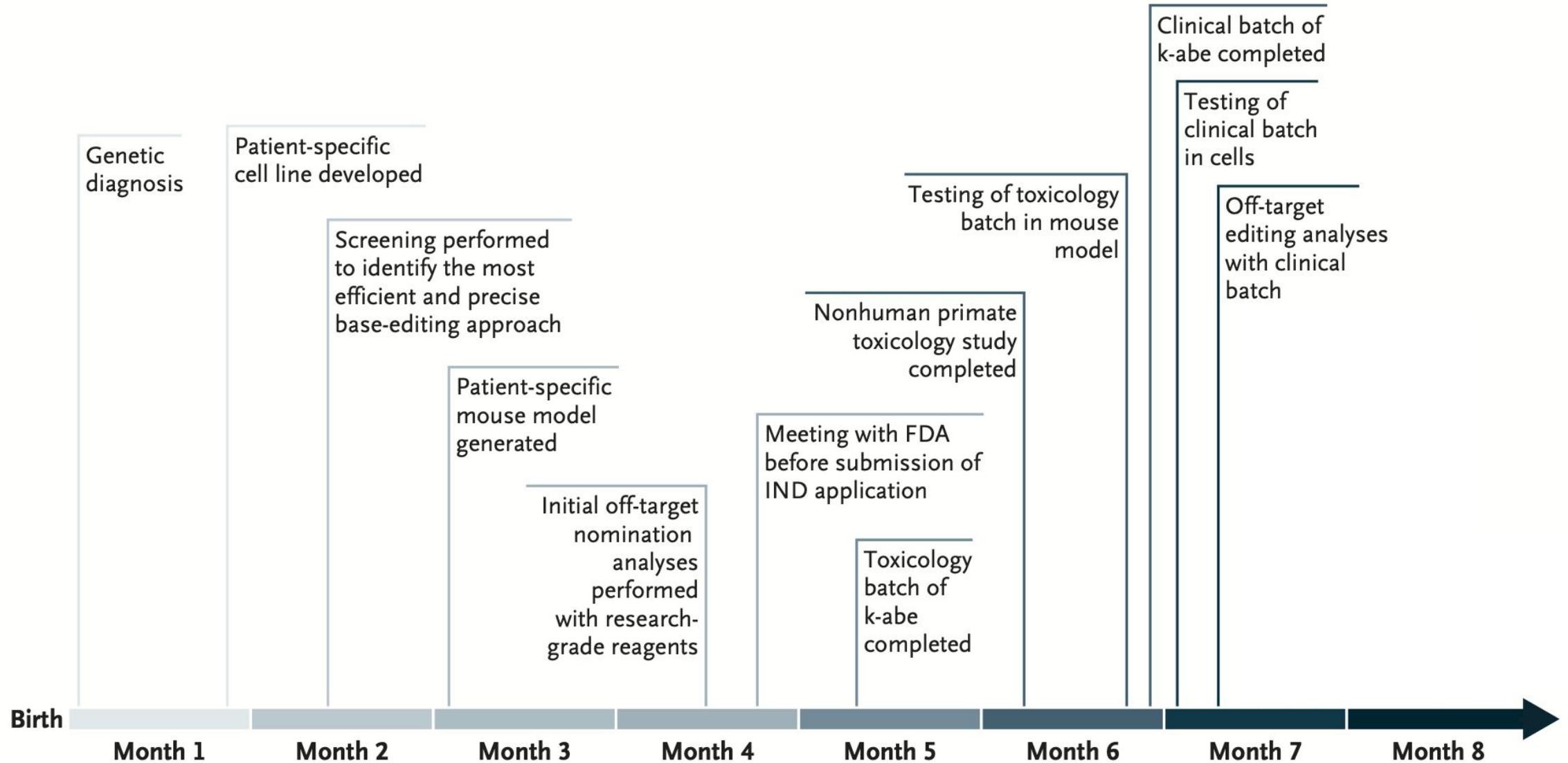


# Manufacturing of clinical batch of k-abe and testing in cells

Q335X lentivirus-transduced HuH-7 cells treated with k-abe

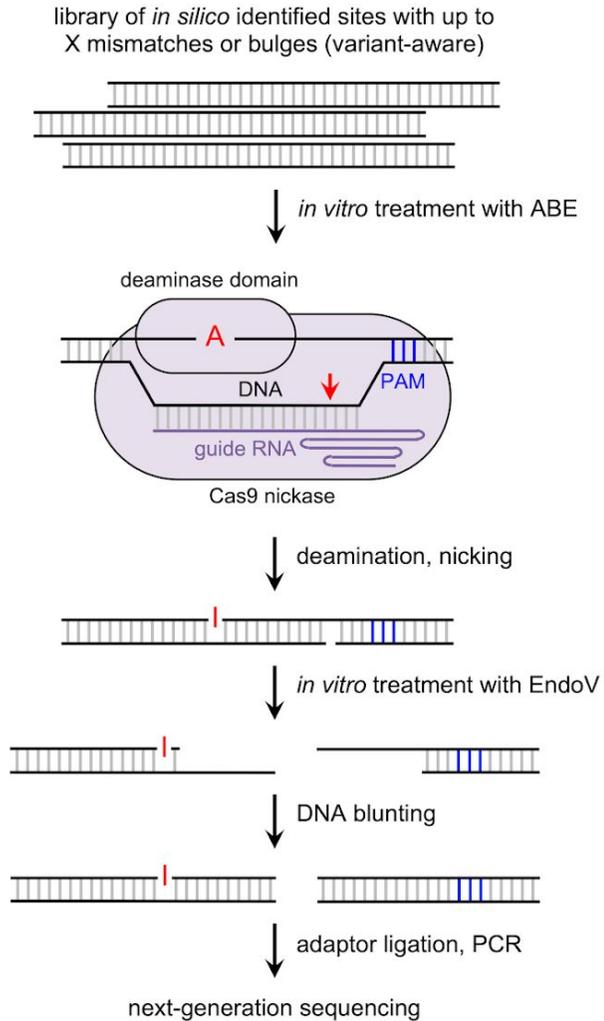


# Off-target analyses with clinical batch of k-abe

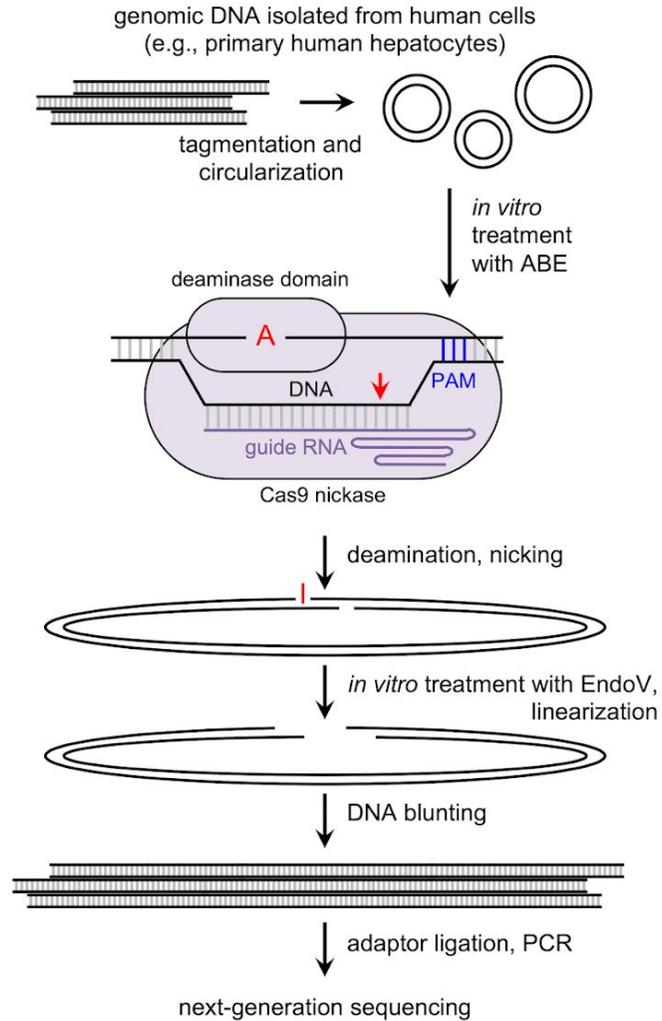


# Patient-specific off-target analyses

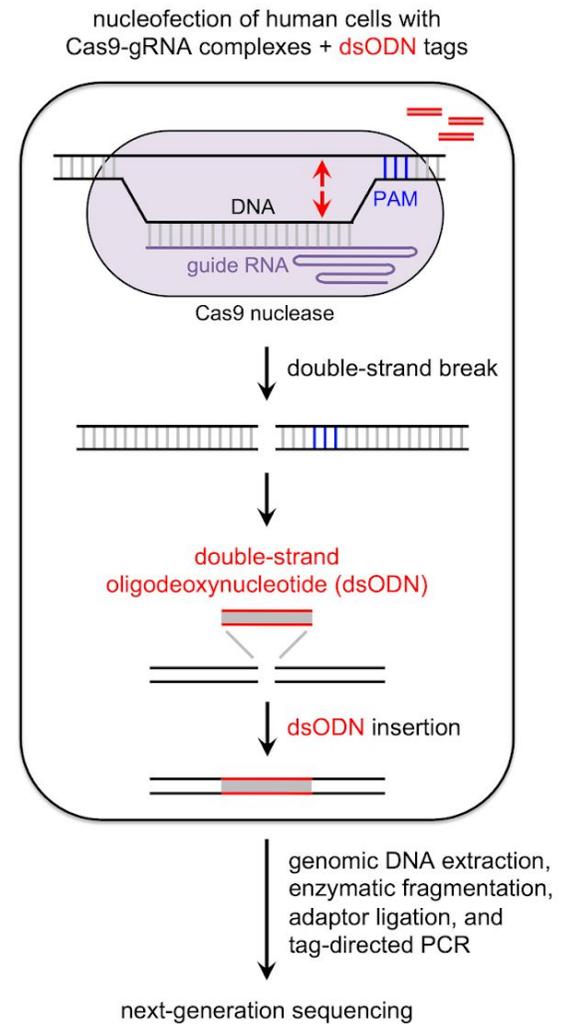
## ONE-seq



## CHANGE-seq-BE

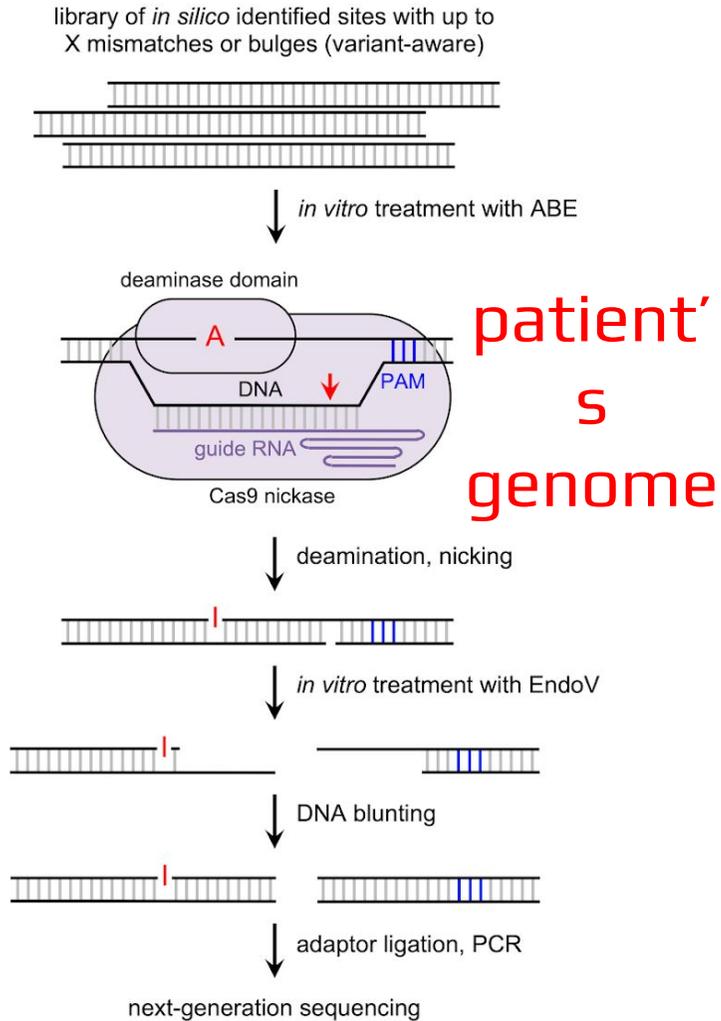


## UNCOVER-seq/GUIDE-seq

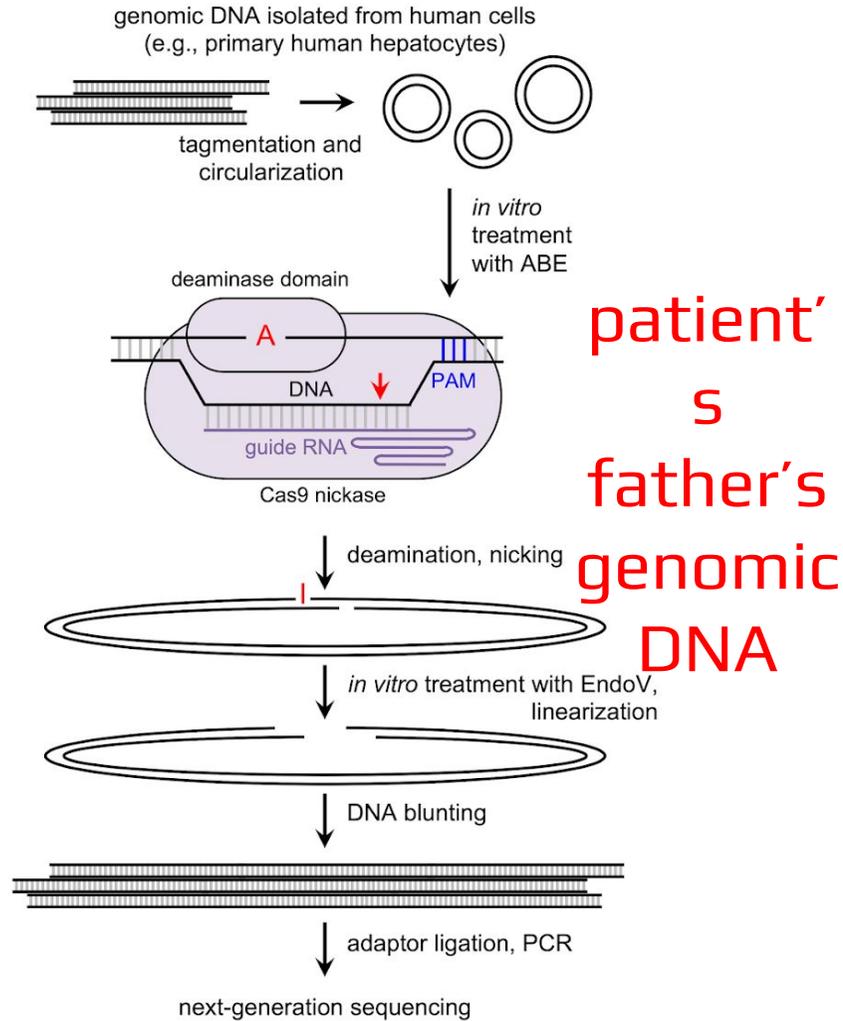


# Patient-specific off-target analyses

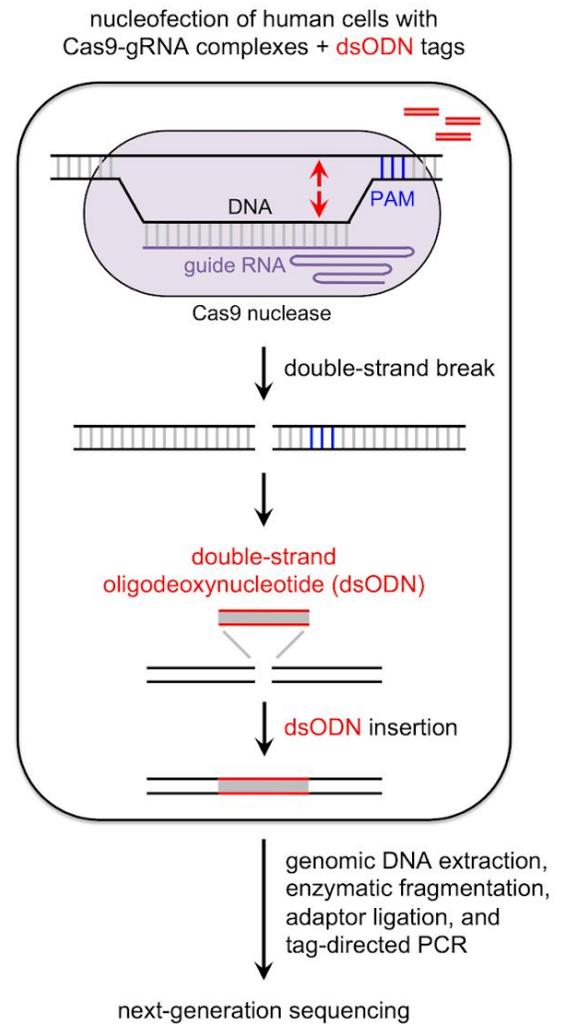
## ONE-seq



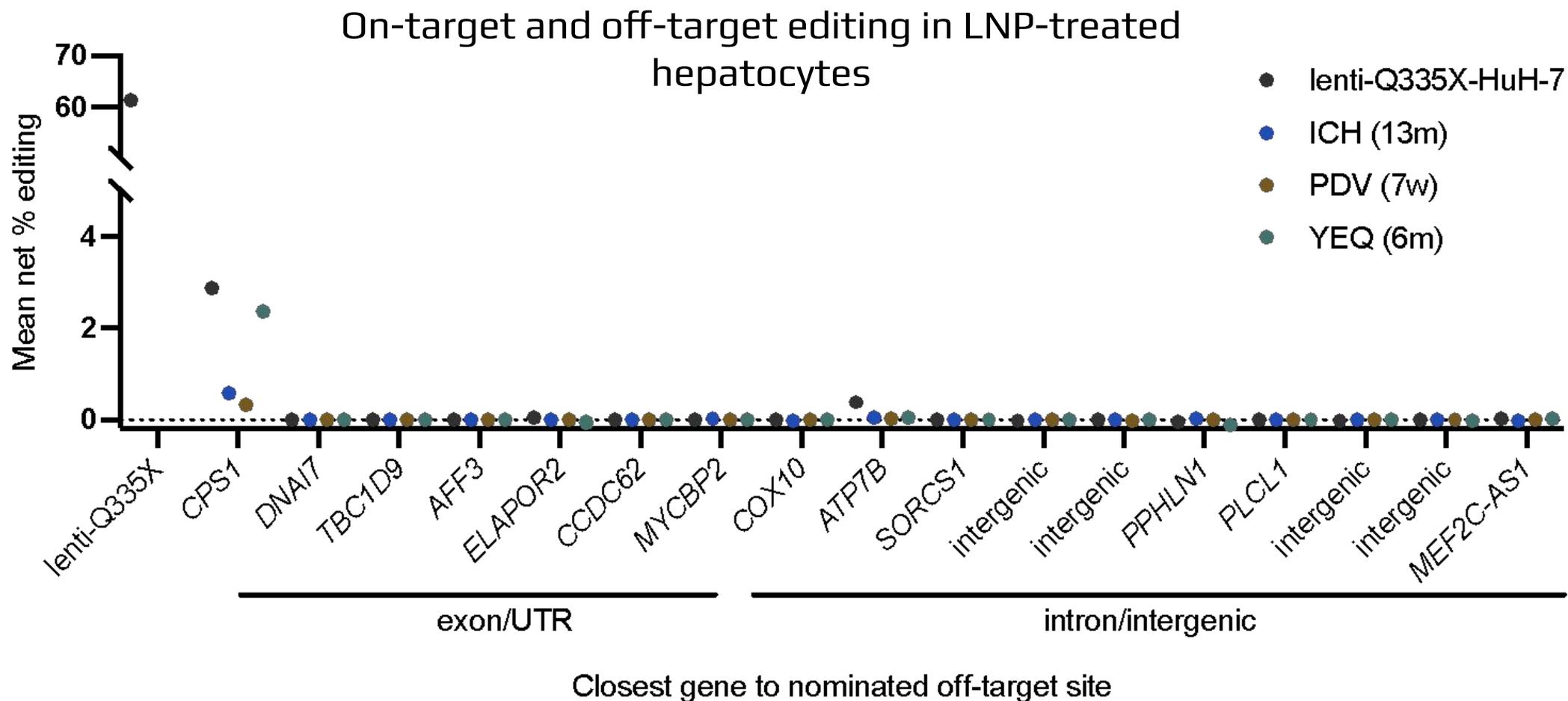
## CHANGE-seq-BE



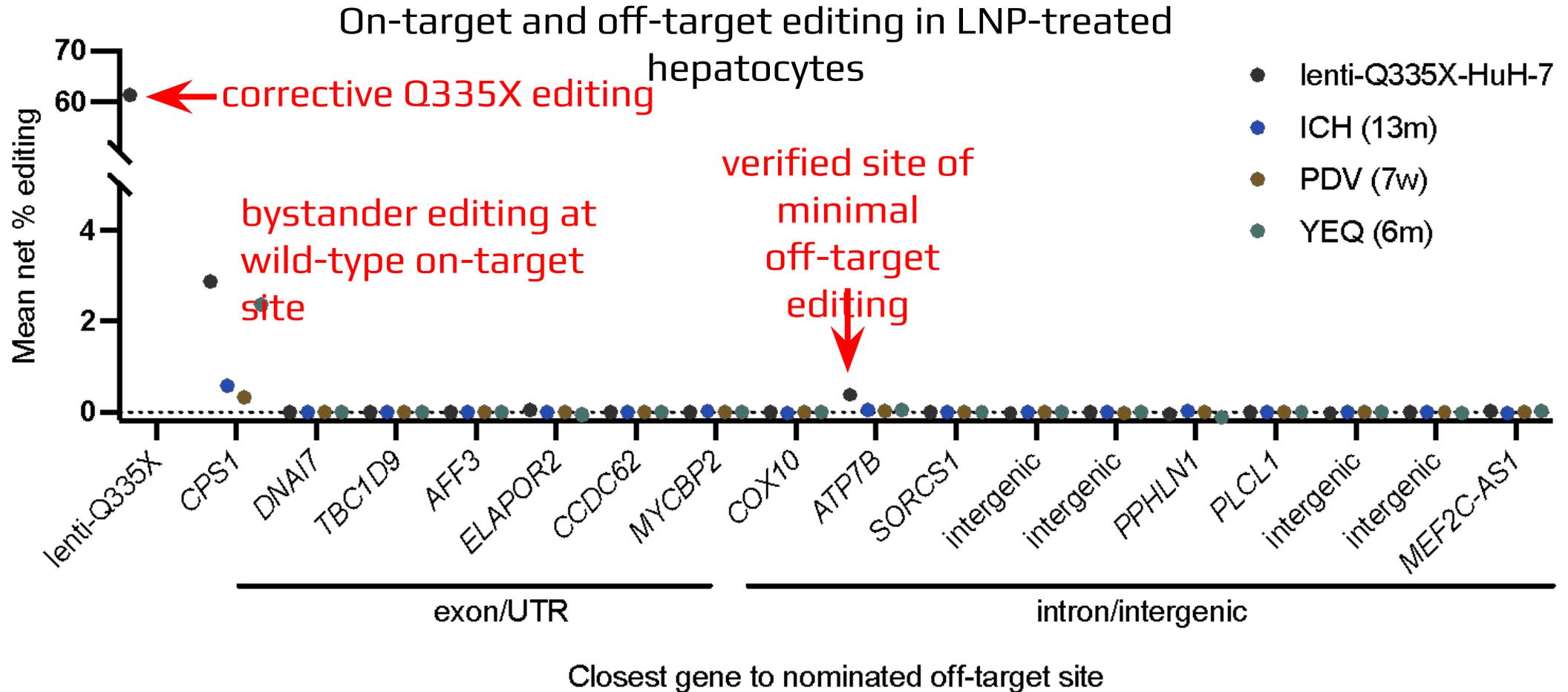
## UNCOVER-seq/GUIDE-seq



# Patient-specific off-target analyses

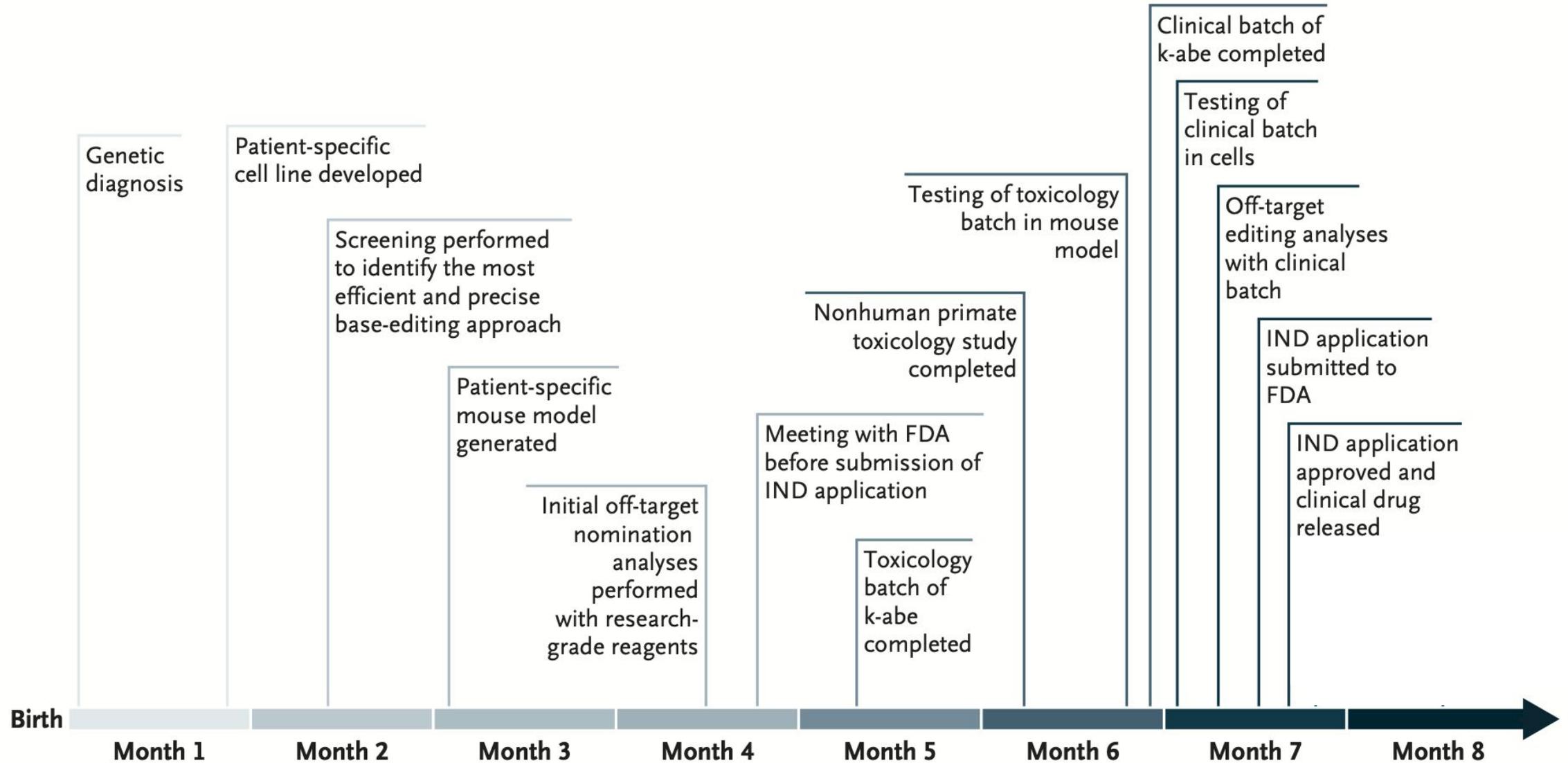


# Patient-specific off-target analyses

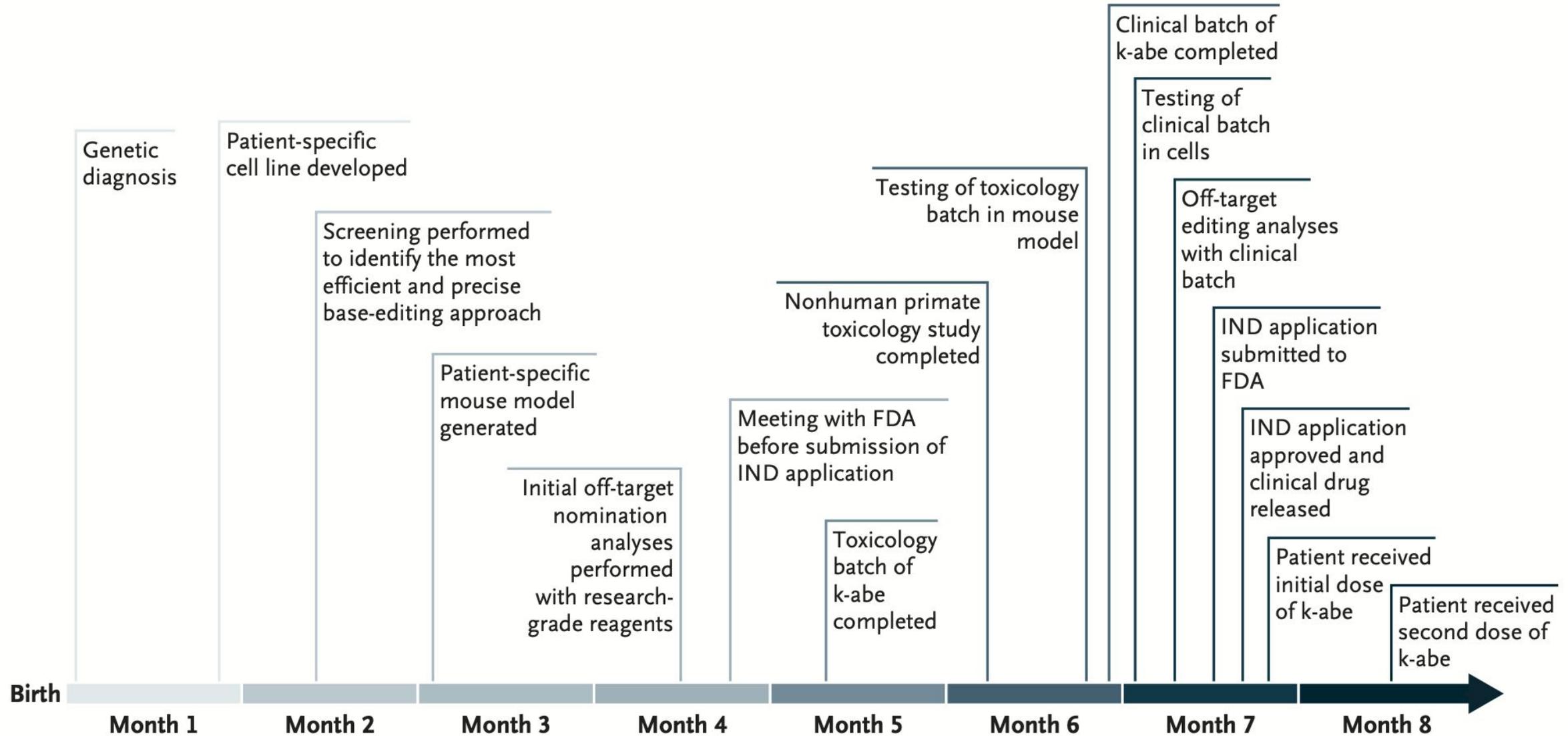


*Completed in 6 months*

# Single patient expanded access IND application to FDA



# Initial treatment with k-abe (day 208 after birth)



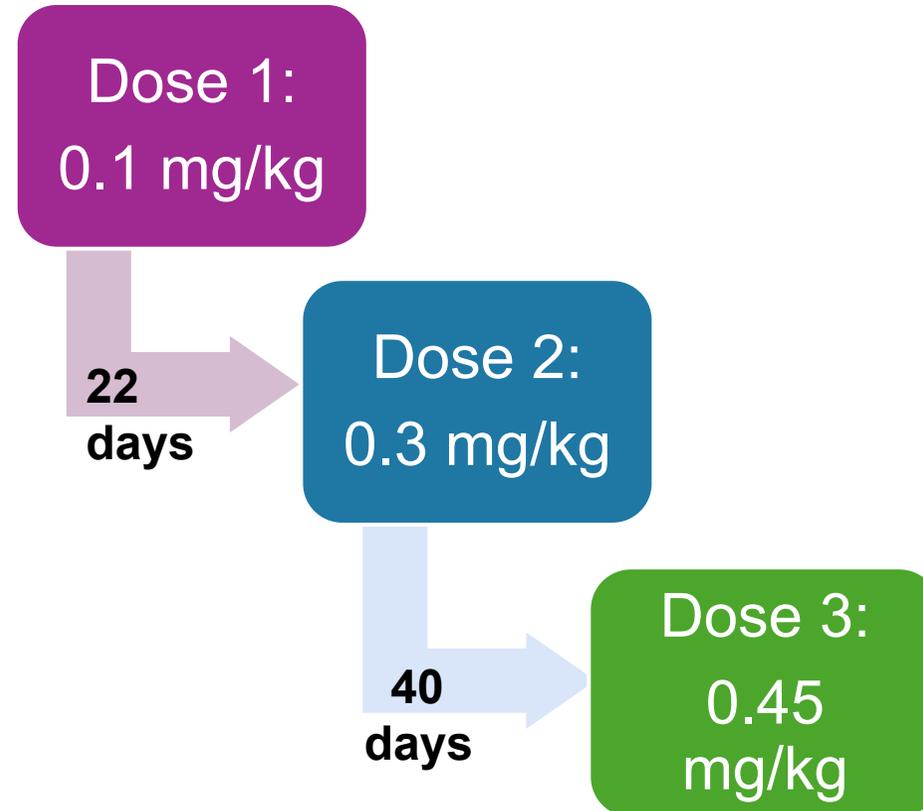
# Single-patient dose escalation plan as part of clinical care

- Initial low dose (0.1 mg/kg) to ensure safety
- Maximum of 3 doses
- At least 21 days between doses
- All doses must be given by 120 days
- As he is presumed CRIM-negative (no full-length protein), given steroid-sparing immunosuppression regimen with sirolimus and tacrolimus
- Decisions to re-dose made by clinical oversight committee with members from:
  - Metabolism
  - Liver transplant
  - Immunology
  - Hematology
  - Gene therapy team
  - Medical ethics

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# Actual dosing schedule



# Treatment with k-abe resulted in no serious adverse events

- Brief coughing episode at beginning of dose 2 and of dose 3; after initial episode, no further cough and able to tolerate full rate of infusion
- Low-grade fever and transient rash after dose 3
- Mild, transient, asymptomatic, dose-dependent increases in ALT with no other liver function abnormalities

 = viral illnesses

# Higher protein tolerance, weaning of nitrogen scavenger medication

 = viral  
illnesses

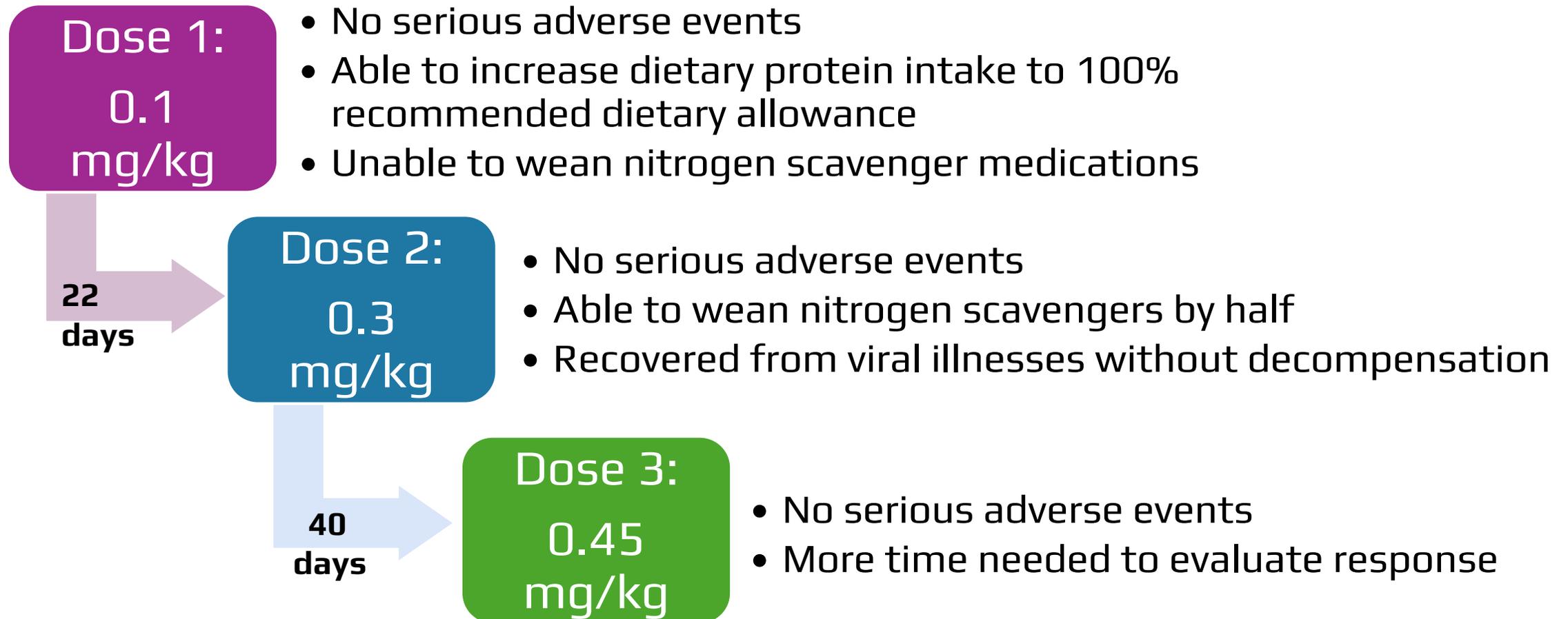
Musunuru, Grandinette ... Ahrens-Nicklas. *N Engl J Med* 2025; online first

# Higher protein tolerance, weaning of nitrogen scavenger medication

 = viral  
illnesses

Musunuru, Grandinette ... Ahrens-Nicklas. *N Engl J Med* 2025; online first

# Longer follow-up is need to understand efficacy and safety



Liver biopsy to assess *CPS1* Q335X editing was not completed due to the risk of the procedure

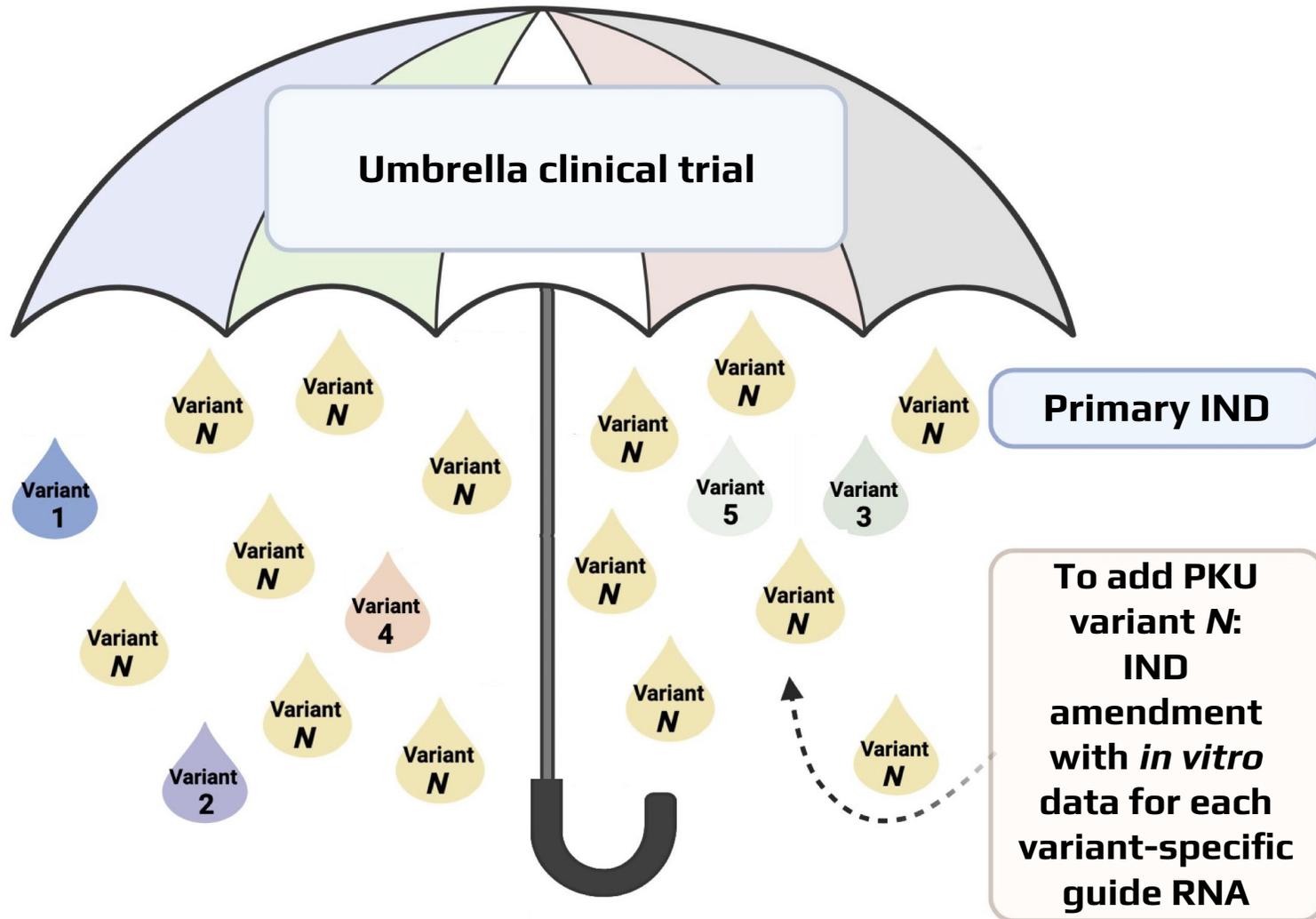
## Conclusions, challenges, and opportunities

- KJ will likely continue to need some urea cycle management, but early signs suggest that his disease may be less severe
- It is possible to develop a personalized gene-editing therapy in 6 months
- Repeated doses of an LNP base-editing therapy can be safely given to an infant
- Longer follow-up and studies of additional non-invasive markers are needed to quantify potential benefit and durability
- Ultimately, we need to move from *N*-of-1 studies to platform trials

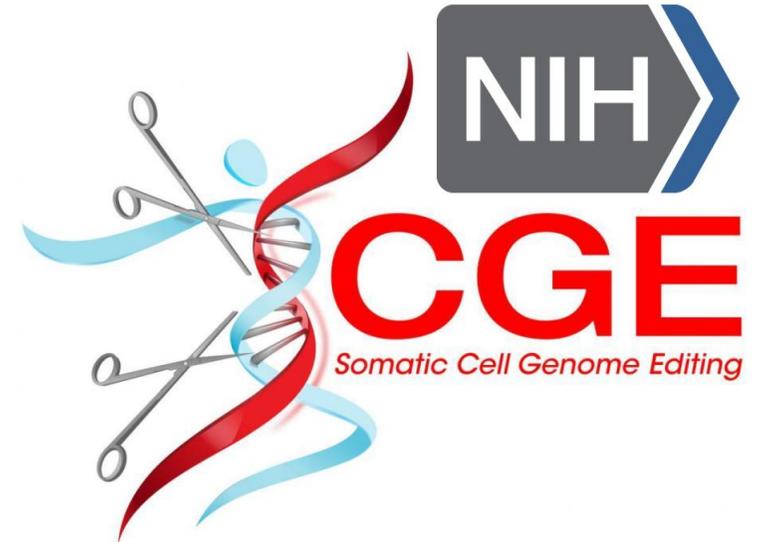
## Conclusions, challenges, and opportunities

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# Umbrella clinical trial for PKU

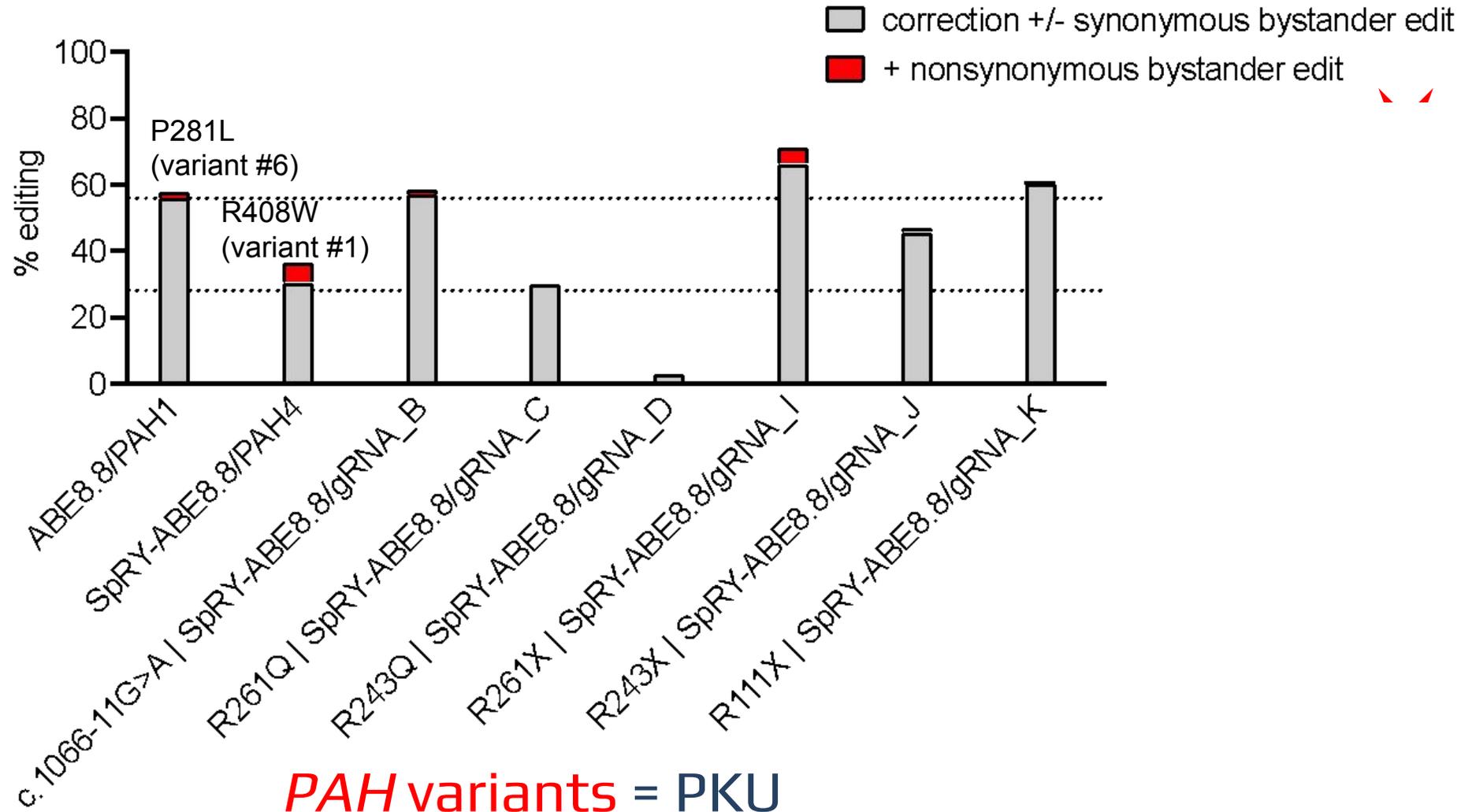


Rebecca Ahrens-Nicklas  
Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP)



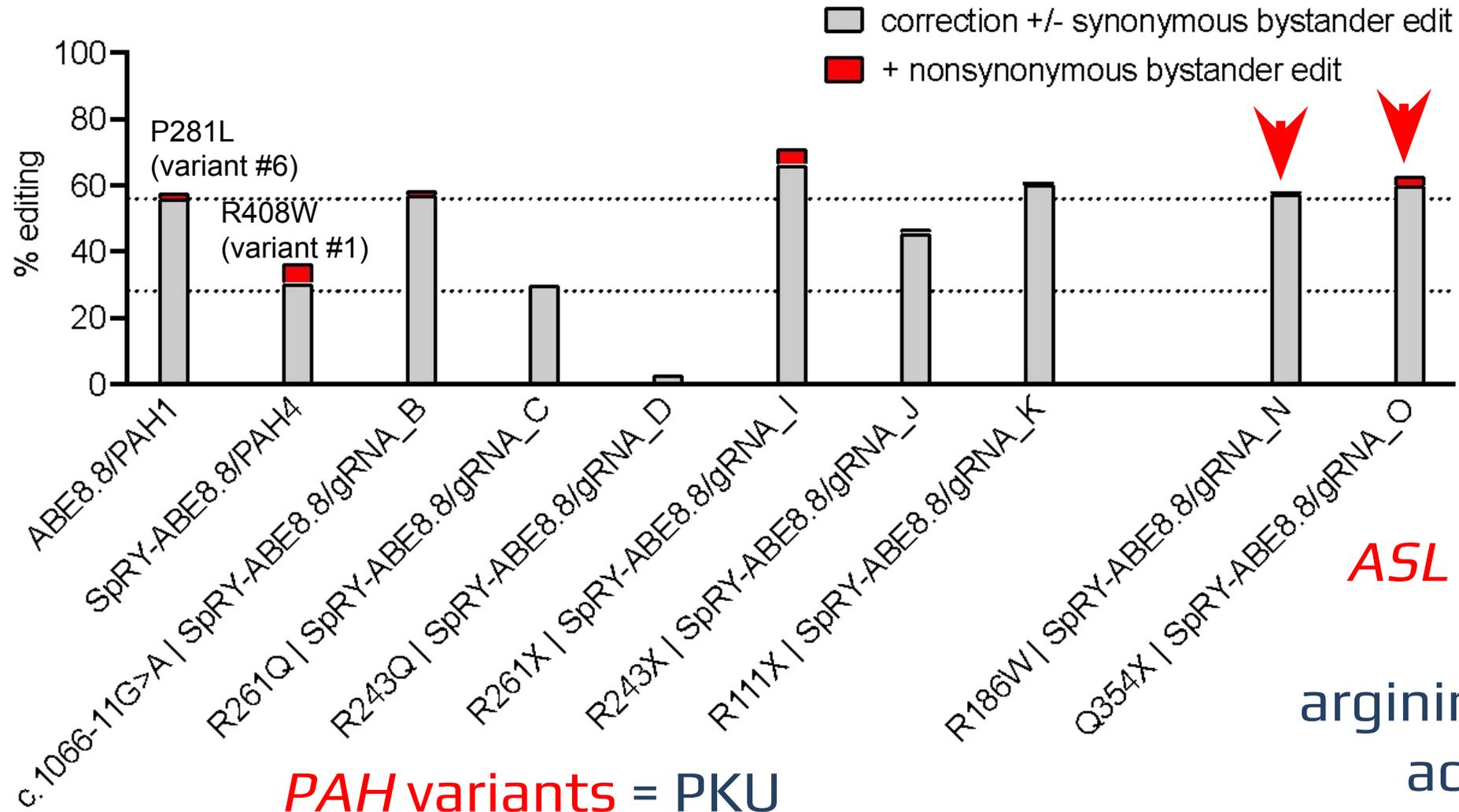
# Screening with SpRY-ABE8.8 mRNA + guide RNAs in HuH-7 cells

lentivirus-transduced HuH-7 cells - mRNA/gRNA transfections for correction of gene variants



# Screening with SpRY-ABE8.8 mRNA + guide RNAs in HuH-7 cells

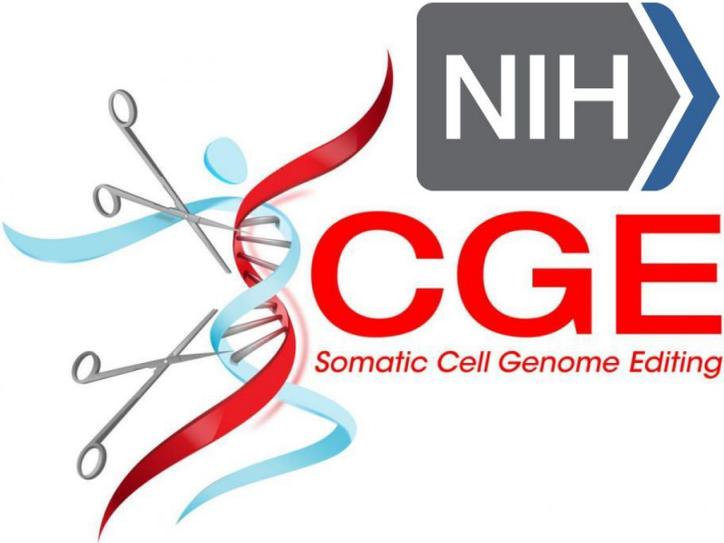
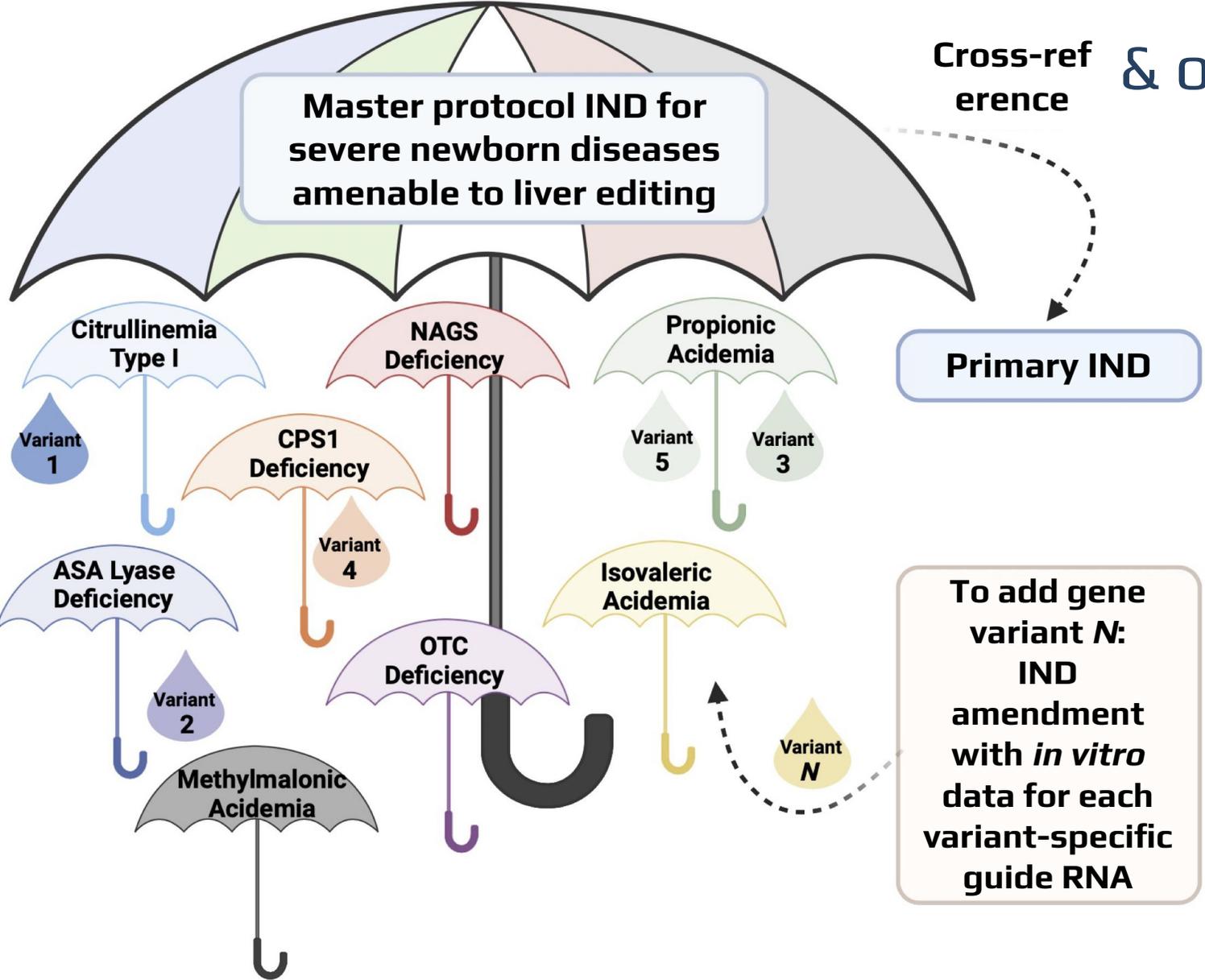
lentivirus-transduced HuH-7 cells - mRNA/gRNA transfections for correction of gene variants



# Master protocol for urea cycle disorders & organic acidemias



Rebecca Ahrens-Nicklas  
Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP)



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Anne Marie Berry

Julia Hacker

Lauren Testa

Elena Kahn

Ananya Talikoti

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