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Pfizer joins a powerhouse syndicate backing \$43M round for Nimbus

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After years of careful preclinical foundation work, Nimbus Therapeutics has added another marquee name to its Big Pharma-heavy list of backers and put together a \$43 million B round that will put its computer-driven drug design technology to the clinical test in one of the hottest fields in biotech.

[Pfizer Ventures](#) is pitching in this time, joined by another new investor, [Lightstone Ventures](#), and a group of original backers that includes billionaire [Bill Gates](#), [Lilly Ventures](#), [SR One](#) from GlaxoSmithKline ([\\$GSK](#)) and founding investor [Atlas Venture](#).

Nimbus, which recently dropped the word "Discovery" from its name in favor of "Therapeutics" to highlight its transition into a clinical-stage company, plans to use the cash to back clinical research on an acetyl CoA carboxylase (ACC) inhibitor--which the company refers to as the "first allosteric and liver-targeted inhibitor intended for the treatment of Non-alcoholic Steatohepatitis," or NASH. Fatty liver disease now affects millions of people, and the disease is viewed as a potential gold mine for developers.



Nimbus CEO Don Nicholson

Don Nicholson, who joined the Cambridge, MA-based company as CEO last fall after a 25-year stint in R&D at Merck ([\\$MRK](#)), tells *FierceBiotech* that he hit the ground running on the B round. And he's clearly pumped at the prospect of leading a company with enough cash to get well into a mid-stage program on the lead therapy, with more work planned for growing a pipeline that has attracted Shire and Monsanto as development partners.

Considerable attention for the company--which included the [2013 Fierce 15 award](#)--focused on the strength of its investors' global reps along with an intriguing tech platform that promised to intertwine co-founding partner Schrodinger in using computer-driven drug design efforts to build a pipeline of small molecule drug candidates. With an assist from Atlas's Bruce Booth, a board member with a decided opinion on biotech budgets, the company set out in the lean-and-mean days of 2009 determined to build a significant company without burning through a big budget.

Nimbus was originally led by Executive Chairman Dan Lynch, of [ImClone](#) fame, and a small virtual crew. And while Nicholson may have more cash now and a team of 15, the thrifty mindset stays in place, with plans to remain semivirtual using dozens of consultants and outside contributors to manage the development process.

"Other than the two nondisclosed programs with Shire and Monsanto, all the assets are unpartnered," says Nicholson, "with several programs migrating through our pipeline." The plan for now is to keep NASH unpartnered as it sets out to nail down the early-stage evidence that Nimbus has something of real value. And there's more nondilutive cash that be banked with the right deals on other therapies.

While NASH has become a hot focus in biotech, says the CEO, the pioneering drugs in the field--like OCA--are also freighted with safety and efficacy issues that should leave plenty of room for next-gen therapies that come along. A Phase I study should offer a clear look at drug activity and allow Nimbus to pivot into a Phase IIa in early 2016. There's enough money to at least get started on a Phase IIb trial, adds Nicholson.

As Nimbus goes to work on NASH in the clinic, Nicholson says there should be plenty of time to assess how the company develops. Maybe that means an IPO, maybe partnering deals, maybe sales. When Nimbus was set up, the decision was made that each asset would be put in its own LLC. That may have complicated things a bit early on, says Nicholson, but the biotech is free now to wheel and deal on each program without affecting the rest of the assets. And Nimbus also has the cash and the kind of influential backers needed to march ahead on its own.

- here's the [release](#)

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