

Versant Ventures Launches Jecure Therapeutics  
Ex-Quantice! team to develop disease-modifying therapies for NASH and fibrosis

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Versant Ventures today announced the debut of Jecure Therapeutics, a biotechnology company with a proprietary liver disease platform that has generated novel programs for non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH) and fibrosis. Versant seeded Jecure as part of the firm's push to build on its past success in the fibrosis field, and was the sole investor in today's \$20 million series A commitment.

Jecure's founding team includes CEO Jeffrey Stafford, PhD, and CSO James Veal, PhD, both of whom were members of senior management at Quantice! Pharmaceuticals, a cancer company founded by Versant and acquired by Celgene in 2015. Drs. Stafford and Veal have collaborated for more than 20 years and have been co-inventors on multiple products including cancer drug Votrient™ (pazopanib), diabetes drug Nesina™ (alogliptin), and other drug candidates currently in clinical development.

The platform at Jecure is based on more than a decade of research and includes proprietary assays and models developed in the lab of academic founder Ariel Feldstein, MD, Division Chief of Gastroenterology at the University of California, San Diego. The company also has assembled a scientific advisory board of leading investigators and pioneering researchers in the NASH and fibrosis fields.

"The series A backing of Jecure renews a successful partnership with Versant, and provides us the opportunity to build another transformational company in a field that is starving for innovation. We continue to have ongoing discussions with strategic and financial partners while we independently build a pipeline of drug candidates based on the discoveries from the UCSD NASH platform," said Dr. Stafford.

"We are thrilled to again be working with Jeff and Jim on a new company," said Brad Bolzon, PhD, Managing Director at Versant and Jecure board member. "Together with Ariel Feldstein and his colleagues, they represent a formidable team that combines drug hunting savvy with world-class scientific expertise and important know-how into this field."

### **Industry-Leading Platform**

The current clinical pipeline for NASH is dominated by repurposed compounds and targets. As a result, researchers in the field have been pushing to identify targets and pathways that are uniquely implicated in NASH.

Jecure will exploit a research platform developed by Dr. Feldstein and the UCSD team – which incorporates siRNA-based murine fibrosis models for target identification and validation; knock-in models for *in vitro* screening; and a unique NASH model that captures key features of the disease for *in vivo* screening. In this disease model, toxic fat build-up in hepatocytes initiates a self-driving inflammation and pyroptosis cycle that leads to NASH and fibrosis. It provides Jecure with potential to identify drug candidates that can intervene throughout the disease process, and better inform the translational development strategy.

Initially, the team has leveraged this platform to target the inflammasome, a multi-protein complex known to play a key role in driving liver inflammation and fibrosis, and expects to name the first of several development candidates of this class by late 2017.

“We believe Jecure’s approach can harness over a decade of pioneering research from the academic founder, and can stand apart in a very crowded field,” added Tom Woiwode, PhD, Managing Director at Versant and Jecure board member.

### **Scientific Advisory Board**

Jecure’s SAB members include Scott Friedman, MD, Gregory Gores, MD, Nizar Zein, MD, and Ariel Feldstein, MD.

- Dr. Friedman is Dean for Therapeutic Discovery and Chief of the Division of Liver Diseases at Mount Sinai School of Medicine. He has performed pioneering research into the underlying causes of scarring, or fibrosis associated with chronic liver disease, and was among the first to isolate and characterize the hepatic stellate cell, which is the key cell type responsible for scar production in the liver.
- Dr. Gores is Executive Dean for Research, Chair of the Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Reuben R. Eisenberg Professorship at Mayo Clinic. He has published over 500 articles, editorials and book chapters and his clinical and research contributions include advances in the understanding of hepatobiliary malignancies, liver transplantation and mechanisms of liver cell injury.
- Dr. Zein is Chairman and Medical Director of Global Patient Services, Mikati Foundation Endowed Chair in Liver Disease and Transplantation at Cleveland Clinic. One of Dr. Zein’s areas of research focus includes improving disease and treatment outcomes in patients with fatty liver disease. He has authored more than 200 publications, and has been the principal investigator of several large clinical trials.
- Dr. Feldstein is a renowned hepatologist and currently Professor of Pediatrics and Chief of the Division of Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology, and Nutrition at the University of California, San Diego. Prior to joining UCSD in 2011, he was Director of Research for the Pediatric Institute at the Cleveland Clinic. He has published over 140

peer-reviewed publications in leading scientific journals including seminal reviews on the disease biology of NASH and liver fibrosis.

#### About Jecure Therapeutics

Jecure is focused on the discovery of novel therapeutics for the treatment of non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH) and liver fibrosis. Jecure's scientific founder is Dr. Ariel Feldstein, Division Chief of Gastroenterology at UCSD School of Medicine and a leading physician scientist in hepatology. With operations in the biotech hub of San Diego, California, Jecure combines emerging NASH biology from Dr. Feldstein's lab with an elite discovery team of veteran pharma/biotech scientists. Jecure's lead program has identified small molecule inhibitors of a novel target and pro-inflammatory driver of NASH. Jecure is backed by top-tier life science investor Versant Ventures. For more information, please visit [www.jecuretx.com](http://www.jecuretx.com).

#### About Versant Ventures

Versant Ventures is a leading global healthcare investment firm committed to helping exceptional entrepreneurs build the next generation of great healthcare companies. The firm invests across the healthcare sector and at all stages of company development, with an emphasis on the discovery and development of novel therapeutics. With \$2.3 billion under management and offices in North America and Europe, Versant has built a team with deep investment, operating, and scientific expertise that enables a hands-on approach to company building. Since the firm's founding in 1999, more than 65 Versant companies have achieved successful acquisitions or IPOs. For more information, please visit [www.versantventures.com](http://www.versantventures.com).

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