

## After VC Funding, Mayo Incubator Tenant Looks To Expand Rochester Presence



Blueprint Bio's biomarker discovery platform taps personalized medicine momentum.

by Don Jacobson

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A "personalized medicine" biotech firm with offices in the Mayo Clinic's business incubator has landed a \$7.5 million venture investment, some of which will go to strengthen its research ties with Mayo and could lead to a much bigger presence in Rochester, its CEO and co-founder says.

Blueprint Bio, of Newport Beach, Calif., announced last week it had closed on a Series A financing. It was led by Forentis Fund, a \$50 million biotech-focused venture capital pool, which confirmed it had contributed \$7.5 million to the round.

Blueprint and a partner company, Emerald Logic of Aliso Viejo, Calif., maintain what now amounts to a sales office in the Mayo Clinic Business Accelerator. It reflects what is currently a relatively modest relationship with the clinic's researchers, who are on the cutting edge in the discovery of the genetic "biomarkers" that underpin the emerging practice of personalized medicine.

But with its new VC investment, company CEO and co-founder Matt Nunez tells TCB he has plans to establish closer research ties with Mayo and hopes to eventually duplicate in Rochester what Blueprint has recently done in Philadelphia in a partnership with the University of Pennsylvania – establish a large-scale joint venture meant to accelerate the pace of pushing personalized medicine out of the lab and into the real world.

The Penn JV, called BluePen Biomarkers, was announced this month with lofty aims. It is described as "a results-focused collaboration of academics, private industry, and research partners around the world dedicated to improving upon existing knowledge of biomarkers through a 'big science' approach."

As part of the effort, the two parties have set up what Nunez calls "the most comprehensive lab in the Eastern United States" to discover and commercialize disease biomarkers.

"The likeliness of our establishing a larger office in Rochester—and even of setting up a sister lab to the one we now have at Penn—is highly possible," the CEO said. "We're currently doing projects for people who are in senior positions at Mayo, and we have projects in a myriad of oncology (cancer) situations as well as auto-immune diseases there."

In the simplest terms, what Blueprint Bio does is to provide researchers with a novel "machine learning" tool developed by Emerald Logic that crunches tremendous amounts of raw patient data—generated through devices

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such as gene sequencers and mass spectrometers—to identify possible biomarker “signatures” deemed most predictive for specific conditions, including a wide variety of cancers, inflammatory diseases, neurological disorders, cardiac health and addiction.

When researchers isolate new biomarker signatures, Blueprint provides a platform for protecting, patenting and commercializing them, thus speeding their paths into the market where they can be used to improve patient outcomes as soon as possible.

But in addition to recruiting major research institutions such as Mayo as customers, Nunez said Blueprint Bio is also developing its own biomarker candidates, and so itself has become a customer of those institutions by funding studies of its own intellectual property. That’s another reason it has set up shop in the Rochester biobusiness incubator: to be on hand as Mayo scientists conduct research on its own efforts.

For instance, Nunez said Mayo researcher Dr. John “Al” Copland was near completion on a validation study for a Blueprint Bio discovery for renal cancer. One immediate use of the Forentis Fund investment would be to commercialize any therapies that arise out of that effort.

Another avenue for possible expansion of Blueprint’s collaboration with Mayo could come via the clinic’s massive repository of biospecimens – its “biobank.”

Mayo and its Center for Individualized Medicine maintain several of the world’s most comprehensive biospecimen collections. One of them is the Mayo Clinic Biobank, a repository of samples, including blood and blood derivatives, and health information donated by patients. Its goal is to provide samples for different types of studies to advance personalized medicine.

“Mayo has expressed a desire not only build a commercial relationship with us,” Nunez said, “but also to have us look at collaborating their own investigators or with outside third parties in working through their biobank.”



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