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ProCertus raises \$2.1 million for drug trials

By Kathleen Gallagher of the Journal Sentinel

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A Madison company developing drugs to protect cancer patients from common chemotherapy and radiation side effects will announce Tuesday it has raised \$2.1 million.

[ProCertus BioPharm Inc.](#) has also started enrolling patients in a clinical trial to determine whether its DermX product prevents burns caused by radiation therapy, said Paul Weiss, the company's acting chief executive officer.

Novartis Venture Fund and Venture Investors LLC led the \$2.1 million financing, which had participation from other existing investors, said Weiss, who is also a managing director at Venture Investors.

ProCertus will use the money to fund the DermX trial, and trials for two more potential products: OralX, which is designed to protect against mouth sores from radiation and chemotherapy; and ProDerma, which was developed to protect patients from radiation- and chemotherapy-induced hair loss.

ProCertus hopes to begin the OralX trial this year and the ProDerma trial next year, Weiss said. The trials will be conducted at the Paul P. Carbone Comprehensive Cancer Center in Madison, he said.

"Because of its capital efficiency, and the team, and my dual role, the investors felt confident enough to put some additional money into it," Weiss said. Founder William Fahl is chairman and chief scientific officer of ProCertus.

After demonstrating the feasibility of the compounds in clinical trials, the company will evaluate ways to commercialize the products, perhaps by partnering with a bigger firm or selling the company, Weiss said. ProCertus licenses its technology from the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation. The company raised \$2.3 million in 2007.

Wisconsin has a growing expertise around cancer therapies and is attracting attention from Novartis and other major pharmaceutical companies, said Tom Still, president of the Wisconsin Technology Council.

"Wisconsin's drug development cluster is coming of age," Still said.