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FierceBiotech's 2008 Fierce 15

By john

Created Jun 23 2008 - 3:26pm



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If you want to know what the future of drug discovery looks like, check out the Fierce 15 Class of 2008.

At this stage, biotechnology has produced a legion of scientists, entrepreneurs and investors who know how to evaluate a technology's potential and organize a new company pointed to proof-of-concept data. That's never an easy task. As one biotech executive recently told me, launching a new program these days means not just factoring in the drugs that are on the market, but also the ones that are in development.

It's no wonder that this year's group includes several that early on adopted a stealth mode of operation. The competition in the industry is fierce, and providing too close a look too early can spark competition. And there's always plenty of that to go around.

As in prior years, many of the companies on the list are closing in on the kind of mid-stage data that can make or break them. They've adopted technologies that are often suited to rapid advancement in the clinic - at least until the program is ready to be partnered out. And they have carefully calculated how much investment capital is needed to reach the next level.

But there are also a selection of companies that have relied in large part on the determination of a tiny coterie of scientists and financiers whose belief in their program could never be matched by the size of their bank accounts. A few on the list are just getting started, some are sizing up their chances in Phase III. All have outsized hopes for what the future holds.

As in prior years, of course, not everyone on the list will prove to be as successful as they desire to be. The odds are always steep in biotechnology, even when you think you have all the risks carefully removed. But at a time when big pharma is more reliant than ever on emerging biotech companies to offer promising new pipeline candidates as well as the technology and tools they need to streamline their own discovery engines, you'll also see a few of these companies make headlines as future acquisition targets or IPO-stage companies with commercial opportunities to pursue.

FierceBiotech will be right there, bringing you the latest news on the industry in a timely fashion. In a matter of weeks we'll pass the 70,000 mark on subscribers, a key milestone for us. Like the Fierce 15, though, we're just getting started.

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