

VENTURE CAPITAL**Flagship-Backed Empress Searches for Medicines From Microbes***By Brian Gormley, WSJ Pro*

Good day. Microbes found in nature historically have been a rich source of compounds for drugmakers. A new biotechnology company launched by **Flagship Pioneering, Empress Therapeutics**, also is searching for medicines from microbes—those inhabiting humans.

Research into microbes in nature has led to the discovery of medicines such as penicillin, an antibiotic produced by *Penicillium* mold. Cambridge, Mass.-based Empress, backed with \$50 million in venture funding from Flagship, probes commensal bacteria, or bacteria not typically thought to be harmful, in the body. Its initial focus is on the gut, a plentiful source of these microbes.

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A chief concern for drugmakers is ensuring that their medicines are safe. Molecules made by commensal bacteria are reasonably likely to be safe, Park said. “When you start with things you find inside the human body, it’s [a] pretty high likelihood they are compatible with the human body,” he added.

Empress hunts for genetic sequences in microbes that cause them to make compounds with properties that make for a good drug, such as potency and ability to selectively home in on a disease target, Park said.

Empress, which formed in 2020 but has operated quietly until now, says it has identified 15 potential drugs. It expects clinical trials to begin next year, Park said.

And now on to the news...

New Money

Sollis Health, a New York-based provider of a doctor, private urgent care and concierge service, added \$15 million in Series A funding from investors including **Arkitekt Ventures, Strand Equity** and **Torch Capital**.