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## British Firm Opens Germantown Lab

Biotech Pioneer Says Drug Testing Technique Saves Time, Money

By Kendra Marr  
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Xceleron, a British life sciences firm that's trying to gain ground in the U.S. market, operates by the old pharmaceutical industry mantra, "Fail fast, fail cheap."

Before a new drug even enters full-scale clinical trials, Xceleron administers harmless, microscopic doses of the potential drug to human test patients. If the results show promise, drug companies can proceed with spending millions of dollars and time further developing the potential product. If not, they're saved that money and time.

Tomorrow Xceleron will open the doors to a \$7.5 million lab headquarters in Germantown and introduce the local biotech cluster to this technique of microdosing. The company says microdosing, designed to let companies bypass less-precise animal tests and shorten the long, costly drug development process, will revolutionize the drug development process.

"The best model for humans is humans," said chief executive Colin Garner.

But the technique is also controversial, said David Jacobson-Kram of the [Food and Drug Administration](#). The vast majority of drugmakers are still skeptical that such minute doses are actually predictive of full-scale trial results, though a handful have embraced microdosing.

"It's been embraced much more in Europe than in the United States," Jacobson-Kram said.

Xceleron isn't new to the region. Since 2005, the company has run a marketing and sales office in Gaithersburg, a coup for [Montgomery County](#) and Maryland in showcasing the international reach of the region's biotech cluster. Last year the Xceleron founders -- husband-and-wife team Colin and June Garner -- moved to Bethesda from Britain to be closer to their U.S. operations.

Now, with a new U.S. lab, Colin Garner aims to position the company closer to the FDA, which has already approved human microdosing.

The Germantown office, located down the street from [MiddleBrook Pharmaceuticals](#) and Avalon Pharmaceuticals, could help Xceleron drum up business from local biotechs.

The goal is to persuade big pharma to adopt the microdosing technique, Colin Garner said.

About 81 percent of the world's research and development dollars were spent in the United States last year, according to a recent Ernst & Young report.

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"We'd be foolish not to be here," said Garner, who spun out Xceleron from the University of York in 1997. "It's such a big market."

Xceleron has received a \$100,000 grant from Montgomery County and is in the final stages of securing a \$100,000 state grant. In exchange, Xceleron promises to hire 100 local employees by 2012.

The company employs 15 people in the new office. Staff from Xceleron's York office are flying into the area to jump-start its Germantown operations and train the new lab employees.

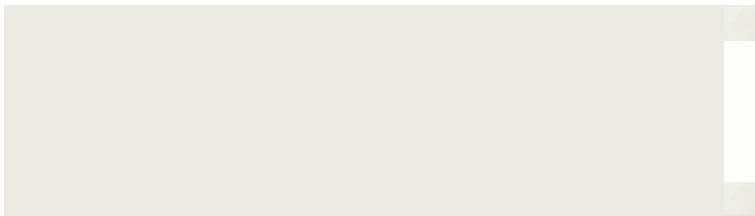
At the heart of the new office are two accelerator mass spectrometers -- \$1.5 million atom smashers and counters, which analyze the effectiveness of potential drugs in human blood samples. Xceleron pioneered the use of these machines, which use the same technology that aids archaeologists in carbon dating fossils, in drug development.

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