



# Ondek plans oral vaccine

**Emily Piesse**

DESPITE some initial setbacks, Nobel Prize winner and medical research scientist Professor Barry Marshall is making inroads after some early setbacks with his spin-off company, Ondek Pty Ltd, which plans to licence an oral vaccine delivery system developed from Professor Marshall's research into stomach ulcer bacterium.

Although Ondek secured \$2.75 million of funding from angel investors in Western Australia and overseas in 2006, the company's research program only began intensively in March this year.

Initial plans were developed in 2005, but the company fell six months behind its financing schedule and took a further six months to recruit staff internationally for its research team, which is based at the University of Western Australia and includes research scientists from Geneva.

Professor Marshall, who is a director and chief scientist of Ondek, said winning a Nobel Prize in the same year had also slowed proceedings, although it had provided networking opportunities for investment.

The company is being financially managed by Sydney boutique



**Barry Marshall**

venture capital group, Exto Partners Pty Ltd, which has two directors on Ondek's board, and will licence its technology to include both human and veterinary applications.

Its vaccine delivery system uses genetically modified bacterium to carry vaccine genes and may be used to deliver drugs or multiple vaccines.

Ondek is also planning to develop and commercialise a drug using the vaccine system, to capitalise on the \$8 billion global vaccine market.

Professor Marshall said his research into stomach ulcer bacteria had revealed broader applications.

"What we found is ulcer bacteria seem to have some mysterious control over the immune system, so therefore we can utilise the Helicobacter bacteria for other vaccines," he said.

Professor Marshall said Ondek had a three- to five-year program of high level, intensive research ahead of it.

"The plan is to keep our noses to the grindstone and generate intellectual property now and for the next two years, looking at licensing opportunities in the third year," he said.

While the company has identified a number of diseases – including influenza, hepatitis and HIV – to which the vaccine delivery system could potentially be applied, Professor Marshall said it was premature to discuss a timeline of outcomes.

"Ondek is funded for the next few years, so we're not talking much about milestones yet. We're not looking for investment – we have everything we need. We're just excited about doing the research in WA," he said.

The company's funding is being used to contract research at UWA, which has a small amount of equity in the project, although Ondek will retain control of its intellectual property.