There are a wide variety of tissue types where you see fibrosis. We remain optimistic about the general (of a drug)."

Dietz’s decision to hand off his work to Blade was centered more on who would best translate the work from bench to bedside. The fact that Evnin was not just a venture capitalist but a scleroderma patient and the leader of a nonprofit that saw the importance of the work in the Dietz lab were key factors.

Still, Evnin himself worried about the blurring of his roles, the “perceived multiple interests in my life that not everyone would necessarily appreciate.”

The decision to go forward received a big dose of validation with the latest funding, Evnin said. Deerfield Management led the round, joined by the venture arm of Pfizer Inc. (NYSE: PFE). The Novartis Institutes for Biomedical Research and drug giant Bristol-Myers Squibb Co. (NYSE: BMY) also took equity in Blade.

MPM and another existing investor, Osage University Partners, also participated in the round.

Blade’s timing couldn’t be better. As the company was ramping up last year, Genentech Inc. and parent company Roche were making changes at InterMune Inc., the Brisbane company Roche acquired in fall 2014 for $8.3 billion. InterMune’s leaders were involved in a hard-fought battle, including a Food and Drug Administration rejection, a costly but confirmatory clinical trial and, ultimately, the victory of bringing Esbriet to market as the first FDA-approved IPF drug in the United States.

Now the InterMune team was looking for new jobs.

“The cornerstone to the company is the incredible talent we have,” said Wendye Robbins, Blade’s president and CEO. “Amassing a core group of fibrosis-specific drug developers is the critical thing.”

Blade’s team includes Brad Buckman, who was InterMune’s vice president of drug discovery and medicinal chemistry; Ravi Rajagopalan, InterMune’s director of discovery biology; Caralee Schaefer, director of pharmacology at InterMune; John Nicholas, InterMune’s director of computational chemistry and biology; and Karl Kossen, who was vice president of disease biology.

"With these people, we have been able to prosecute and curate a (drug) candidate quickly and come up with a chemical series to take forward in a year,” Robbins said. “That’s pretty fast.”

For a venture capitalist, that progress is important to see, even more so when you’re a patient as well.

“I’m proud of the funding of Hal’s work at the foundation. It was catalyzing,” Evnin said. “It’s the jewel that I’m proud of playing a role in.”