

Hadassah Lieberman Visits UNMC Lied Transplant Center



Hadassah Lieberman and retired Sen. Bob Kerrey (right) are greeted by Omaha State Senator Deborah Suttle, UNMC Chancellor Harold M. Maurer and his wife Beverly.

Hadassah Lieberman, wife of Joseph Lieberman, democratic vice-presidential candidate during the 2000 presidential election, visited the UNMC Omaha campus on Oct. 16.

Lieberman's tour of the Lied Transplant Center at UNMC included visiting with scientists within a cancer research lab; learning more about the "cooperative care" aspect of organ transplant patients' treatment; and moderating a forum on health issues with former patients, their family members and UNMC physicians.

Lieberman has organized national and international conferences on women's health, and has consulted for non-profit organizations emphasizing the achievements of adults and children with disabilities.

UNMC to Study 'Leukemia Pill'

The effectiveness of a promising new treatment – STI571, the so-called "leukemia pill" – for chronic myeloid leukemia is under study at UNMC.

Steven Pavletic, M.D., is the principal investigator of the study in which 1,032

patients were enrolled at 140 centers in the United States, Europe and Australia. The study was closed early when researchers exceeded the goal of enrolling 850 patients. Results are now being analyzed.

The drug attaches itself to small sites in cancer cells, attacks and inhibits their function, said Dr. Pavletic, assistant professor of internal medicine-oncology and hematology. In this study, STI571 was compared to interferon treatment in newly diagnosed patients.

"It's a beautiful drug," he said. "It's a new approach that is showing hope in stopping the progression of the disease for patients who cannot undergo bone marrow transplantation. We are impressed at the low level of toxicity and effectiveness."

About 40 percent of patients with more advanced leukemia who were involved in other phases of the study successfully responded to the treatment. Dr. Pavletic expects the drug to be available for patients with advanced disease by year-end.

Chronic myeloid leukemia is a stem cell disorder that can cause death and occurs most often in adults at an average age of 55.

UNMC Studies Promising Device for Depression



Dr. William Burke

Researchers at the University of Nebraska Medical Center Department of Psychiatry are involved in a nationwide study that could become the first new treatment for depression in 50 years. Out of more than 100 sites that applied to participate in the study, UNMC was one of 20 centers selected to test the safety and effectiveness of an implantable device.

UNMC has received a \$275,000 grant from Cyberonics, Inc., to conduct a 12-week study that will test the company's NeuroCybernetic Prosthesis system, an implantable device similar to a cardiac pacemaker. The device is a stopwatch-sized generator implanted in the chest with a nerve stimulation electrode attached to the vagus nerve in the neck. It delivers preprogrammable, intermittent electrical pulses 24 hours a day.

The device will be studied for its effectiveness in people with moderate to severe depression who have not responded to other treatments. Current treatment options for depression include anti-depressant drugs, psychotherapy, and electroconvulsive therapy.

"This may give people with severe depression another option," said William Burke, M.D., professor and director of the UNMC Psychopharmacology Research Center.

"We are encouraged by the results from the pilot study. Forty percent of the 30 patients in an initial study met criteria for having recovered from their depression. That is pretty amazing given the average length of time that those persons had been depressed was more than 10 years."

Xenotransplant Program Gets Nearly \$2 Million Grant

Ximerex, Inc., a biotechnology company founded by UNMC scientist William Beschorner, M.D., has received a \$1,999,029 Advanced Technology Program grant to develop innovative technology for xenotransplantation, the transplantation of organs from animals.

The three-year project would lead to hybrid livers, consisting of pig livers partially repopulated with human cells, for transplantation into patients with liver failure. The xenotransplant program involving Ximerex, UNMC,



Dr. William Beschorner

and others would address a major unmet need caused by a severe shortage of human organ donors.

“Our program is unique in its ability to overcome a major obstacle to xenotransplantation, severe rejection. That technology along with this grant to develop hybrid livers and the highly acclaimed reputation of the clinical transplant programs puts UNMC in a lead position to develop a successful clinical program for pig xenotransplants,” Dr. Beschorner said.

Today there is a severe shortage of human organ donors. For most organs, as many as 10 times as many transplants could be performed, if the donors were available. The transplantation of pig livers could resolve this shortage.

Grant to aid UNMC in Rheumatoid Arthritis Study



Dr. James O'Dell

UNMC has been awarded a three-year grant totaling \$756,000 from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services through the National Institutes for Health for

research into predictors that will help determine the most appropriate drug therapy for rheumatoid arthritis sufferers.

The grant will be used to study DNA and blood samples taken from more than 500 patients who have participated in clinical studies in UNMC's rheumatoid arthritis network over the past 10 years, said James O'Dell, M.D., principal investigator. Dr. O'Dell is professor and chief of the rheumatology section of the department of internal medicine at UNMC.

“By studying the DNA and blood samples, we hope to be able to ascertain the most appropriate drug therapies for individuals with rheumatoid

arthritis. If we're successful, this is something that could literally impact millions of people around the world,” Dr. O'Dell said.

Directory Lists State's Health Professionals

A directory of Nebraska's health-care resources reveals 1,458 physicians in Douglas County, compared to nine in Box Butte County, where the sole pediatrician and obstetrician are near retirement age.

The directory points out the number of clinics in each community – five in Niobrara, two in Mullen, 18 in Fairbury – and lists physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners and dentists who serve each clinic site.

Such information, gathered by the Health Professions Tracking Center at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, is compiled in the 2000-01 Directory of Nebraska and Western Iowa Healthcare Resources.

Published annually, the directory is the most complete and accurate resource available for information on physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, dentists, clinics, and hospitals.

Each directory costs \$45, plus shipping and handling. For more information, call the Health Tracking Center at (402) 559-9526, or visit the center's Web site at www.unmc.edu/hptc/.

Eppley Cancer Center Receives \$104,000 from Cattlemen's Ball Proceeds

UNMC's Eppley Cancer Center received \$104,000 in proceeds from the 2000 Cattlemen's Ball of Nebraska, an event which was held June 3 at the Haythorn Ranch near Arthur, Neb.

The Cattlemen's Ball is held annually to promote beef in a healthy diet and to showcase rural Nebraska. All of the money raised stays in Nebraska, with 90 percent of the proceeds going to the UNMC Eppley Cancer Center and 10 percent directed toward health-care needs in the community hosting the event.

The 2001 Cattlemen's Ball will take

place June 2 at the Thacher Cattle Company, which is located southeast of Valentine, Neb. Hosts will be Don and Sandi Ormesher, their son and daughter-in-law, Mark and Kami Ormesher, and Mark and Kami's four children.

Tickets are now available. For more information, call Dean Jacobs, Valentine/Cherry County Visitor Promotion Board, (800) 658-4024.

Group Forms to Support Medical Research

Citizens from across the state joined to form Nebraskans for Research (NFR), a private, nonprofit group to support medical research, in September.

The group's mission is to ensure that Nebraska maintains an environment supportive of leading-edge research into the treatment and prevention of some of the most serious diseases afflicting Nebraskans and all citizens.

Voluntary Executive Director of NFR is Sanford Goodman, a retired Omaha businessman. He said the group plans to accomplish its mission by educating the public about Nebraska-based research and the role of state and federal funding in those research efforts, and to strengthen understanding between the public and research scientists.

Certain aspects of medical research have become the subject of political debate, Goodman said. “If politics create a hostile environment for research, top scientists will go elsewhere and Nebraska will suffer.

Nearly nine out of 10 Nebraskans say that job growth made possible by discoveries in science and medicine is good for the economy, Goodman said. Of those polled, 55 percent would like to see more government-funded research in Nebraska.

For more information about Nebraskans for Research, call (402) 397-9295, or e-mail nebraskansfor-research@yahoo.com or visit the Web site at nebraskansforresearch.org.