Stem Cells 101

What are stem cells, and what makes them different from other cells found in the body?

Stem cells have the cellular capacity to become almost any cell type found in the body. This includes heart muscle cells, skin cells and even neurons (i.e., cells found in the brain and spinal cord). During human development, all cells are instructed by the body to begin dividing and, eventually, become a specific cell type. This process is cell differentiation and, as adults, our cells are limited in their ability to choose their cell type. Current research supports stem cells’ ability to become any cell type, leaving adults with a more profound possibility of “choosing” to generate specific cells. Once applied to a body region, stem cells act like a light switch (i.e., they turn off or on, depending upon the body’s signals). This enables them to mimic and eventually become like the surrounding cells; non-stem cells may not adapt and are, accordingly, limited in this capacity. What we do not know is how stem cells longitudinally adapt after being placed in an affected region. This means we do not know what happens 20 years (or even five years) post-surgery. Current research is attempting to answer these important safety questions, and having this knowledge is essential to understanding their full therapeutic potential. Issues like controlling when cells divide, what they become and how to keep them viable until grafted are additional research questions. All these hypotheses are currently unanswered, and their resolution is an important scientific step.
Stem Cell Research and Cures Initiatives in Iowa

The issue over the future of stem cell research was debated during a three-hour public hearing in the Iowa House chamber on February 21, 2007. The University of Iowa College of Medicine sponsored a bus of supporters to speak in support of a House bill. The bill was approved by a 26-24 vote in the Iowa Senate and the vote in the House proved equally close. The bill passed the House with a final vote of 54-46.

Henry Paulson Says Goodbye

Henry Paulson, MD, PhD, Neurologist and Co-Director of the HD Center of Excellence, recently accepted a position as the Lucile Groff Professor of Neurology at the University of Michigan, beginning this summer. He will expand the neurodegenerative disorders program at Michigan and continue his polyglutamine disease research, which includes HD. Though he is excited about new collaborations, an expanded lab, and the opportunity to continue caring for those with HD in his new position, he will sorely miss his colleagues, research participants and patients that he has cared for while at Iowa. He also takes some comfort in the fact that he hopes to continue working with his Iowa colleagues despite the distance. Staff, colleagues and friends will dearly miss him.

Hoop-a-Thons Aplenty

The Iowa chapter of HDSA is planning multiple hoop-a-thons this spring to raise money and create awareness of HD. Please show your support and join neighbors and friends in a fun activity. Shoot some hoops and support the Iowa chapter of HDSA that, in turn, helps fund the HDSA Center of Excellence at the University of Iowa. It’s not just caucuses that put Iowa on the map! The Iowa chapter continues to be a top fund raiser for HDSA.

March 31 Storm Lake
Storm Lake Middle School
10-1 pm

April 14 Bedford
Bedford High School
1-4 pm

April 15 Audubon
Audubon High School
1-4 pm

April 21 Blair, NE Blair High School
1-3 pm

April 28 Marion
Vernon Middle School
1-4 pm

April 29 Des Moines
AIB College Activities Center
1-4 pm

Stem cell supporters speak to Iowa House from left-Stacie Vik, Mary Nugent Woods, Erin Rogers, Anne Leserman, Jana Hanson
CIT-HD
Abbreviation for Citalopram

Do you know someone that is diagnosed with HD? Is that person NOT taking an anti-depressant medication? The HD Center at the University of Iowa is looking for 20 such people. The CIT HD study assesses results of thinking tasks in participants with early symptoms of HD. This is a double blind study of citalopram, a medication sometimes prescribed for depression. For more information call Bill Adams at (319) 353-4411 or email william-h-adams@uiowa.edu

COHORT
Cooperative Huntington’s Observational Research Trial

COHORT is a multi-site, long-term observational study. Our goal is to collect information in order to learn more about HD (such as potential treatments, planning of future experimental drug studies, and work toward postponing the onset or slowing the progression of HD). The study will be open to both adults and children who have clinically diagnosed HD, and to adults who are part of HD families.

Participation in COHORT is voluntary, and visits will be scheduled annually for as long as individuals are able and choose to participate. At the initial visit (year one) a blood sample will be drawn for genetic testing of CAG repeat and other possible biomarkers. Medical and neurological evaluations will be performed at each yearly visit; these include standardized assessments of movement, thinking, memory, ability to perform everyday tasks and behavior.

Welcome NEW Social Worker to Des Moines Support Group

Mark Hillenbrand is the new social worker for the Des Moines support group. Mark holds a masters degree of social work and is a licensed master social worker. He is a second year resident in the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center’s training program. He provides counseling and psychotherapy to individuals and couples. He has special interests in illness, depression, substance abuse and trauma. We are happy to have Mark facilitating the DM group. Please welcome him!

The HD Family Study

is looking for young adults 19-30 to volunteer to complete a survey about their teen age years, living in a family where a person had HD. This information will be very important in helping devise ways to support teens in HD families who try not only to keep up with being a student and teenager, but also with being in an HD family. You may be contacted by mail to assist with this survey. If you would like to receive a survey, please contact Anne Leserman anne-leserman@uiowa.edu or (319) 353-4307. Dr. Janet Williams in the College of Nursing at the University of Iowa is the Primary Investigator for this study.

Research Assistant in the Paulsen lab
New PREDICT Coordinator

Mackenzie Elbert graduated from the University of Iowa in 2004 with her Bachelors of Science in Psychology. While in college she was active in research in the department of Psychology and for the past three years has been a Substance Abuse Counselor for an adult residential treatment center. She enjoys sewing, gardening, and cooking. She also likes to spend time with her family, friends, her two cats, Maceo and Jamie, and her Great Dane puppy, Apollo.

HD Support Groups:

DES MOINES
Valley View Village Conference
2571 Guthrie Ave
3rd Sunday at 1:30 pm
Mark Hillenbrand (NEW leader)
(515) 208-3511

OMAHA, Nebraska
Village Inn Restaurant
78th and Dodge
2nd Monday at 6:00 pm
Cathy McNeil
(402) 537-0739

IOWA CITY
University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics
Della Ruppert Conference Room
6th floor, elevator H
4th Sunday at 1:00 pm
Anne Leserman
(319) 353-4307
Ombudsmen in Iowa

A Long Term Care Ombudsman is an advocate for residents of nursing homes, residential care facilities, assisted living programs and elder group homes. As a result of the Older Americans Act, each state is required to have a Long-Term Care Ombudsman program. The Ombudsman’s Office can investigate and resolve complaints that may affect the health, safety, welfare, or rights of residents. AARP Iowa is working to support legislation to protect nursing home residents’ rights and deliver high standards of nursing home quality care by increasing the number of state Long Term Care Ombudsmen. Iowa’s Ombudsman program has the lowest number of Ombudsman staff per long-term care beds in the nation. AARP supports increasing the Ombudsman staff to safeguard the quality of care in long-term care facilities.