

Researchers focus on Hepatitis treatment

BY MICHELLE STARR
Staff writer

UNL researchers are using a cattle virus to try to find a Hepatitis C anti-viral drug treatment.

The research could help the estimated 3 million people in the United States infected with Hepatitis C, said Ruben Donis, UNL molecular virologist in the department of veterinary sciences.

The long-term disease can cause serious liver damage, including scarring of the liver, and in most cases leads to death.

"Ruben Donis has come up with a very similar virus, which one can work with in the laboratory," said Marsha Torr, UNL vice chancellor for research.

Donis, along with four researchers in his lab, is working in collaboration with the Veterans Hospital of Omaha and Roy French, associate professor of plant pathology at UNL, to use culture tissues of Bovine Viral Diarrhea

to research Hepatitis C.

The Hepatitis C virus will not grow in culture tissues, making laboratory research almost impossible. Because BVD is genetically similar to Hepatitis C and can be grown in tissue cultures, it could aid in finding a Hepatitis C treatment, said Daniel Perez, a UNL researcher working on the project.

The focus of the research, which began about a year ago, is to determine how the two viruses are connected and what can be learned from the tissue samples - possibly a treatment for the disease.

The research is using BVD plasmid, a procedure developed four years ago by University of Nebraska-Lincoln researcher Ventyz Vasslive, which creates an intermediate life stage of the virus that can be studied in the laboratory.

It substitutes genes in BVD for genes of Hepatitis C. Researchers are able to learn about Hepatitis C through BVD tissue samples, Donis said.

Finding an effective drug treatment has

been a problem because no one can grow this virus in tissue cultures to study it, Donis said.

The researchers are looking for information about how the virus interacts with its host and what causes the disease, Perez said.

The differences between the viruses are that BVD doesn't affect humans or the liver of the cattle, but it does affect the immune system of the cow. Both can cause persistent infections, and those infected are infected for life, Perez said.

Hepatitis C has no treatment. Some patients with severe liver damage have to resort to liver transplants, but it is an extreme procedure, Donis said.

"There aren't enough livers to go around to begin with," Donis said.

Infected people can go five to 10 years without experiencing liver problems, and some can go up to 20 years without problems.

Hepatitis C can be transmitted through bodily fluids such as infected blood and mucus. Contaminated intravenous drug needles, poorly sterilized medical instruments, unbandaged

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RUBEN DONIS
UNL molecular virologist

cuts or injuries, tattooing and body piercing needles, shared razors and toothbrushes can transmit the virus.

Donis and the researchers are hoping for the best.

"We're going to try to work for the next four or five years. After five years it's a little ridiculous," Donis said.

If the researchers are unsuccessful, UNL will still have a large collection of tissue samples, Donis said.

Storied spit history has followed police

■ The force is happy the council is considering an ordinance that would make spitting on people illegal.

BY JAKE BLEED
Senior staff writer

At about 5 p.m. on Christmas Eve, 1989, Lincoln police officer Katherine Finnell and other officers responded to a call from an apartment manager complaining about a man trespassing on the property.

The 34-year-old trespasser was drunk and resisted arrest, Finnell said, forcing officers to handcuff the man.

As Finnell walked him to her police cruiser, the 34-year-old turned and spit in Finnell's face.

"In my face, down my face, on to my uniform. It was disgusting," Finnell said. "I can still smell it."

An ordinance being considered by the City Council would make spitting on other people - police officers and citizens alike - a crime.

The ordinance would make spitting "intentionally, knowingly or recklessly" on another person a misdemeanor offense.

The Lincoln City Council read the ordinance for a second time Tuesday.

Police Chief Tom Casady said

the police department proposed the ordinance partially because police officers are a common target of lung-launched loogies.

"This is the sort of thing that just about any police officer has experienced at one time or another," Casady said.

A city ordinance against spitting on city sidewalks, but not people, has been in place since 1936.

"It's been illegal for many decades to spit on sidewalks in Lincoln," Casady said.

"It seems like we should protect people as well as we protect sidewalks."

People arrested and handcuffed can still spit at arresting officers and, for the time being, get away with it.

Casady said part of an officer's on-the-job-training is knowing how to avoid a suspect's spit.

"You learn to pick up on the cues that someone is about to cough up a wad of phlegm and fling it in your direction," Casady said.

Officer Tom Duden, a 26-year Lincoln police veteran, said he'd been spit on about 10 times in his career.

Duden said it was difficult for police to punish people spitting on them, making the ordinance a welcome law.

"That's what the ordinance is intended to do," Duden said. "Be a little more specific to the problem."

CORRECTION

The City Council will vote on the spitting ordinance in two weeks, on Nov. 15. A headline in Tuesday's Daily Nebraskan misidentified the date of the vote.

Hard work propels UNL senior

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said.

"Travis played football in high school. He was always working. He wanted to do well, so he put in the time during the off season so he could do his best when the time came."

Travis said he couldn't think of a time when he was told he could not do something.

"It was always, 'Yeah, give it a try,'" he said. "A lot of people are surprised. In high school football, the looks I got from opponents at the beginning of the game to the end of the game were different. There was definitely a turnaround," Travis said.

Travis and Garret said their dad had a great amount of influence in shaping the people they are today.

"He taught us how to live our lives, not to sweat the small stuff, to laugh it off. He said that we'd go crazy if we took everything seriously," Garret said. "He was stern with us; he didn't let us get away with a lot. He definitely helped to shape us into good people as we grew up."

Travis and Garret were the youngest of the four boys.

When interviewed, the brothers both reminisced about the same childhood memory, and the trouble they caused with their two older brothers.

"I remember once that Travis and I wanted chocolate doughnuts," Garret said.

"Our mom had a doughnut machine, and we decided that we wanted to make some. We made three dozen doughnuts and ate them all. Mom

couldn't figure out why we didn't want any of the doughnuts that she made three days later," he said.

Travis said, "We spent the morning getting into trouble with my brothers and the afternoons fixing it."

Evenings around the Dendinger home were spent laughing, the brothers said.

"There were meals that would end with our family laughing so hard that they were falling off their chairs," Garret said.

Even now, Travis said he doesn't have a lot of worries.

"I just want to get my school work done on time. That occupies most of my time right now," he said. "I know that the work that I'm doing now will help in my future. I just don't spend a lot of time worrying about it."

Mandate sets fraternity rules

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Williamson said the NIC has been proactive in educating fraternity members about the dangers of alcohol.

"Statistics show that chapters with alcohol-free housing have higher grades, fewer insurance claims and houses in better shape," he said.

Though some national houses are just now signing onto the agreement, it is not new.

The NIC's statement urging chapter houses to be alcohol-free has been around for 20 years, Williamson said, and Farmhouse Fraternity has been dry since January 1974.

Taylor Faulkner, Beta Theta Pi Fraternity's Interfraternity Council delegate, said he had not heard about the mandate, but said his house was alcohol-free anyway.

Jaron Luttich, UNL Chi Phi Fraternity president, said his chapter is alcohol-free, but not because of the mandate.

The national chapter of Chi Phi did not sign the NIC's mandate.

"National Chi Phi does not believe that eliminating alcohol solves problems," Luttich said. "But it says we must follow all local, state and national laws. Because we are a dry campus, we follow all local rules."

Kappa Sigma Fraternity President Adam Miller said he had heard about the mandate and that his house was alcohol-free.

But that wasn't always the case.

Kappa Sigma just moved back into a fraternity house this fall after losing its house because of alcohol and financial problems in December 1997. "Right now, we're 100 percent

dry," Miller said. "(Members) understand where we're going with that."

Being alcohol-free has improved the living conditions in the house, Miller said.

"The house isn't dirty all the time now," he said. "And it's university policy so we don't have CSOs or campus police crawling down our backs."

When contacted by the Daily Nebraskan, two other University of Nebraska-Lincoln fraternity presidents would not comment on the status of their chapter houses.

With the mandate, Williamson said the NIC wants to show fraternities that drinking alcohol is not the only way to have fun.

"We want to provide options," he said. "You don't need alcohol to have a great time, and you don't need alcohol to have a good life."

Activist's life, contributions recalled

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Nebraskans for Peace after she decided there were no signs of the Vietnam War subsiding.

"It was getting more and more violent," Paul Olson said. "She didn't want her own children to die."

Betty Olson kept Nebraskans for Peace going after the Vietnam War ended, even though many other anti-war organizations came to an end, Rinne said.

She was the state coordinator for 10 years. She gave up the job and then served on the board of directors.

"She was indispensable and ubiquitous, and now she's gone," Rinne said.

Paul Olson said he and his wife urged each other on in their activism.

The two met in college, where Betty Olson was the homecoming queen and president of her sorority.

"She was the typical '50s kid,"

Paul Olson said.

The eventual husband and wife became educated on a number of causes, from McCarthyism in the '50s to Vietnam in the '70s.

"We sparked each other," Paul Olson said. "Our political interests were a mile wide and an inch deep."

Not only did Betty Olson take stands on issues affecting the well-being of people around the world, she formed a coalition between white and American Indian people in Thurston County to get rid of an abusive sheriff, her husband said.

She also supported state Sen. Ernie Chambers' efforts for a divestment motion for South Africa.

Olson felt strongly about issues but had a mild demeanor, her husband said. She would use her soft but confident voice to confront state legislators.

Paul Olson said he remembered one time when a senator didn't respond too well despite his wife's

gentle approach.

"He just abused her," he said. "But she just took it gently, went on with her testimony and finished with dignity."

Rinne was familiar with Betty Olson's way of proving her point.

"She made me a better person than I ever thought I could be - through guilt," Rinne said. "She had a moral presence about her."

Betty Olson's subtle way of guiding others - especially young people - was evident to her before she died, Paul Olson said.

Her husband read letters sent to his wife by young people who learned from her not to accept the status quo.

He read them to her on her death bed.

"You could see a flicker of a smile on her face," Paul Olson said. "What concerned her the most was people losing the will to oppose the powers that be."

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