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UNMC researchers develop fetal cell study alternatives

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — University of Nebraska Medical Center researchers have developed some new alternatives to replace aborted fetal tissue for research in Alzheimer's disease and other degenerative brain conditions.

However, researchers said Wednesday they must continue to use donated cells from elective abortions until an alternative source can be found to replace fetal tissue for research in Alzheimer's disease and AIDS-related dementia.

The controversy over the use of aborted fetal tissues erupted last November when it was reported that fetal brain cell tissue was being used in research at the Medical Center.

The first successful recovery procedure was conducted on premature infants several weeks ago. Other details were not available due to confidentiality requirements.

"The goal of this program is to use alternatives to fetal tissue cells as we are able," said Dr. Howard Gendelman, UNMC's chief researcher on degenerative diseases of the brain.

Using the new research, UNMC has been able to recover astrocytes and microglia — two of the three cells needed for the

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UNMC researcher

research.

So far, researchers have only been able to recover mature neurons — the third and most important research component — from aborted fetuses.

The announcement did not satisfy opponents of using aborted fetal tissue in the research.

"We don't want to just see a reduction in the amount of aborted babies used. We want to see the whole thing end," said Julie Schmit-Albin, Executive Director of Nebraska Right to Life.

UNMC spent around \$250,000 to create a research team, provide support staff and provide new technology for the project, Gendelman said.

The program required development of a protocol for gaining family approval to recover the cells. It also requires a team of about a dozen researchers to be assembled when the patient dies.

The cells must be recovered

within two hours of death.

Adults could be used for tissue donation in the future, said Dr. Susan Swindells, director of UNMC's HIV Clinic.

Swindells said that will depend on the condition of potential donors' brain tissue, which can be affected by disease.

Researcher Anuja Ghorpade said scientists must use the same type of tissue they are trying to cure in their research.

"Without mimicking human disease as close as possible, it is difficult to find the correct answer," Ghorpade said.

The University has sent its protocol to the National Institute of Health with applications for \$2 million in grants to continue the program.

"We are encouraged. Not only are we able to do it, we've been able to do it rather quickly," Gendelman said.

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