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LOS ANGELES TIMES

NEWS

Published March 21, 2005

Sip for charity, sip for the cure

• A wine-tasting event to raise money for diabetes research netted nearly \$200,000.

By Lindsay Sandham, Daily Pilot

Every year for the past four years the North American Foundation for the Cure of Diabetes holds a wine-tasting fundraiser in Newport Beach -- "Taste for the Cure."

The foundation, which estimated that it raised \$190,000 from a Sunday event at Pelican Hill Country Club, initiated a partnership between UC Irvine and the Canadian University of Alberta in Edmonton, the founder of an insulin-producing, cell transplant procedure.

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According to David Imagawa, Associate professor of General Surgery at UCI, if everything goes smoothly with the Food and Drug Administration, a transplantation program should be up and running at UCI by September. Imagawa will oversee the program.

"The biggest hurdle is there is a lot FDA paperwork because we're bringing the islet cells from Canada," he said.

The procedure, which isolates islet cells in the pancreas of a donor, will actually be

performed in Edmonton. The islet cells will then be delivered to the doctors at

UCI, who will inject them into the liver of a person with diabetes. If it works, the recipient should start producing insulin on his or her own.

The problem, Imagawa said, is that it can take cells from up to four deceased donors to cure one person.

The first recipient of the transplant surgery at UC Irvine will be Dottie Denes of Villa Park.

"I'm very excited about it," she said. "I really can't imagine waking up every day and not having to take insulin. It means that perhaps I'll no longer have to take insulin, and it can perhaps reverse some of the negative effects that diabetes has caused."

Imagawa said this program wouldn't be possible without the support of the foundation. Last year the wine-tasting fundraiser brought in more than \$170,000 for research and development of a cure.

Jerry Stefani, the chairman of the foundation's board, said his son, Brian Stefani, is also on the five-person list to receive the cell transplant procedure.

Brian Stefani said he hopes to receive cells from a live donor, most likely a family member.

This form of the surgery is still being tested, but has seen some more immediate results, he said.

Imagawa said there are other centers in the United States that are actively trying to do this procedure, with centers in Florida and Minnesota being the most effective so far.

"We do a lot of research in that area," he said. "It will probably tie in very closely to the stem cell program at UCI."