

8/28/2007 2:30:17 AM

Geron sees progress in stem-cell therapy: STUDY OF HEART ATTACK PATIENTS
[San Jose Mercury News (CA) (KRT)]

San Jose Mercury News (CA) (KRT) via NewsEdge Corporation :

Aug. 27--Geron, which hopes to soon begin human tests of its human embryonic stem-cell-derived treatment for damaged spinal cords, on Sunday reported progress with another potential stem-cell treatment for heart attack victims.

In a study published in the journal Nature Biotechnology, the Menlo Park company and researchers at the University of Washington said they had used human embryonic stem cells for the first time to help regrow heart muscles in rats that had suffered heart attacks.

The study is preliminary. But Geron's Chief Executive, Tom Okarma, said he is highly encouraged by its findings. He added that Geron expects to gather enough data on the technique to ask the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in late 2008 or early 2009 for permission to test the concept on people.

Geron is even closer to seeking FDA approval for an unprecedented human test of another treatment it is developing from human embryonic stem cells for spinal injuries, Okarma said. Although Geron executives had hoped to begin such a test last year, Okarma said the company now plans to ask the FDA in the next couple of months for permission to start it.

Many studies are under way in people using treatments made from adult stem cells, which are specialized cells that grow into certain types of tissues. But the FDA has never approved human tests with human embryonic stem cells, which can grow into any tissue in the body.

That's partly because the embryonic variety haven't been studied as long as the adult kind. In addition, the Bush administration has severely limited federal financing for human embryonic stem-cell studies, because those cells come from discarded embryos.

Despite the Bush administration's stance, however, Okarma said he has gotten no indication from FDA officials that they would reject his request to test the cells in people.

"We have absolutely zero evidence that the White House policy that is so restrictive on embryonic stem-cell research has had any influence on the FDA," he said.

Contact Steve Johnson at sjohnson@mercurynews.com or (408) 920-5043.

<<San Jose Mercury News (CA) (KRT) -- 08/28/07>>

Copyright © 2007 San Jose Mercury News, Calif.

