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****Researchers report success with
kidney transplant biopsy technique

DALLAS -- Kidney transplant researchers at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas report a greater than 90 percent success rate in using a fine needle aspiration biopsy to detect early signs of transplant rejection and toxicity.

On Nov. 13 and 14 they will teach the biopsy technique to other U.S. transplanters at an International Symposium on Fine Needle Aspiration of Renal Transplants, to be hosted by the health science center and Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas.

Transplanted kidneys fail to survive for a number of reasons, including attacks by the body's immune system and toxicity caused by anti-rejection drugs, says Dr. Harold Helderman, professor of internal medicine at the health science center and medical director of the Kidney Transplant Clinic at Parkland.

Transplanters must watch closely for clinical signs of rejection, including fever, tenderness in the transplant area and, as a sign of kidney dysfunction, a rise in serum creatinine levels. Typically, testing for signs of trouble involves the use of X-rays, blood and urine analysis. Listening to complaints from the patient may also indicate that therapy needs to be altered.

But now, the fine needle biopsy allows doctors to spot early signs of destruction and monitor the progress of a transplanted kidney through a process that can be carried out quickly and safely.

The technique, developed by Dr. Pekka Hayry of the University of Helsinki, Finland, involves the use of a fine needle to withdraw small amounts of fluid from the kidney. The sample is then examined under a microscope to look for cellular abnormalities that signal rejection or toxicity.

Leading the international symposium on the technique will be Helderman, who, along with UTHSCD pathologist Dr. Jose Hernandez and former head of nephrology Dr. Juha Kokko, traveled to Finland over a year ago to learn the technique. Since then the researchers have championed the method's use in the United States.

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Having performed more than 350 aspirations with the biopsy technique, the UTHSCD/Parkland team has reported its preliminary findings at national and international conferences and in the medical literature. With the symposium, they will become the first U.S. medical center to train American transplanters in the use of the technique.

Speakers at the symposium will include Dr. Eeva von Willebrand of the University of Helsinki and Dr. Philip Belitsky of Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

As many as 20 people are expected to attend the free symposium from major transplant centers such as the University of Pittsburgh, University of California at Los Angeles Medical School, University of California Medical Center at San Francisco and the Cleveland Clinic. The seminar will involve patients at their bedsides, laboratory work and lectures.

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NOTE: The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and the School of Allied Health Sciences.