SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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RESEARCHERS BEGIN DRUG TRIAL IN HOPE OF FINDING NEW WAYS TO TREAT ACUTE KIDNEY FAILURE

DALLAS – August 17, 1998 – Each year 20 million Americans are affected by kidney and urological diseases, while 150,000 develop acute kidney failure. The current treatment for kidney failure is dialysis – a sometimes painful and always costly stop-gap measure that is not a cure – or kidney transplant.

Dr. Robert Star, a UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas researcher, has been awarded $40,000 per year for the next three years to study a drug that has reversed the onset of acute kidney failure in animals.

"With the mortality rate being anywhere from 25 percent to 50 percent for individuals who develop acute renal failure, new methods for detecting, preventing and treating acute renal failure must be sought," said Star, associate professor of internal medicine.

The National Kidney Foundation estimates there are 53,000 Americans waiting for life-saving transplants, and 10 people die each day while waiting. Star's research involving the drug α-MSH could reduce the disparity of organ allocation in this country that results in unnecessary deaths. "We have found that α-MSH treatment significantly reduced renal damage and inhibited the disease at a number of different steps even in transplanted kidneys," Star said.

"This means that a less-than-perfect kidney could be transplanted. It could help increase the number of available kidneys, which would reduce the waiting list for recipients considerably," Star said.

Phase I of the study, funded by the Baxter Extramural Grant Program, will evaluate the drug in four groups of people: dialysis patients, kidney-transplant patients, patients that already have acute renal failure and people without kidney damage.

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Star also has developed a new way of testing kidney function. The conventional method can take up to three hours but is not practical for patients with acute kidney failure, which can strike within days or even hours.

"This new procedure measures kidney function in 45 minutes and allows the patient to receive results within one or two hours," Star said.

Researchers collaborating with Star on the α-MSH trial from UT Southwestern include: Dr. Khashayar Sakhaee, professor of internal medicine and the BeautiControl Cosmetics Inc. Professor in Mineral Metabolism and Osteoporosis, and Dr. John Middleton, associate professor of internal medicine. Dr. Andrew Fenves from Baylor University Medical Center and Dr. Karl Brinker from Methodist Medical Center also participated in the study.

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