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News

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*****Diabetic volunteers needed for insulin research.

DALLAS--Researchers at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas need diabetic volunteers for clinical tests of human insulin.

Most diabetics who take insulin now take a combination of beef and pork insulin, which are slightly different chemically from human insulin, says Dr. Philip Raskin, associate professor of Internal Medicine. Raskin is looking for diabetic volunteers to help test human insulin now produced by two drug companies but not yet approved by the Food and Drug Administration for general use.

Beef and pork insulin cause an allergic reaction in about five percent of the diabetics who take insulin. It is expected that human insulin may also benefit patients with no evidence of allergy since the compound is identical to that produced by the human body. Until now it has been impossible to produce human insulin in the lab for a price patients could afford.

Now human insulin is available from two companies with different production techniques.

Through biosynthesis Eli Lilly Co. has developed a bacteria that produces the human hormone. The human insulin gene is combined with a virus, which is injected into E. coli bacteria. The E. coli continues to multiply, making insulin, which is "harvested" and purified.

A chemical technique developed by Novo Laboratories, Inc. changes pork insulin into human insulin by modifying one amino acid on the molecule. The pork insulin is extracted from pancreata obtained at the slaughterhouse. The pork and beef insulin now in use is also obtained from the slaughterhouse.

What benefits would diabetic volunteers get from participating in one of these studies? The most attractive benefit to most people would be the free insulin, says Raskin. Also, they may get additional blood tests that the researcher has access to. But above all he says is "the excitement of being a pioneer in diabetes research."

(over)

Patients who want to participate need the knowledge and approval of their personal physicians, who must be willing to continue to care for them. Raskin stresses that this is a research study and patients will still see their physicians on a regular basis.

The Lilly study of the bacteria-produced insulin lasts two years with a patient visit to the health science center every two months.

The Novo study of the chemically modified insulin involves five visits during a six-month study.

Patients would receive either human or porcine insulin for the first half of the study, and then they would be switched to the other. Both studies are double-blind, which means that neither patients nor researchers know who is receiving which insulin until the study is over.

Diabetic patients who are taking insulin and are interested in volunteering as subjects for either study may call Marilyn Alford at 688-2017.

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