



[embargoed]
[00.01 18TH November 2009



news release

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01AM
Wednesday, 18th November 2009

New Transplant Technique Gives Hope To Diabetes Patients

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Photocall: Wednesday 18th November, 12.00 p.m. at The Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service, Ellen's Glen Road, Edinburgh, EH17 7QT

30 year old mum Kimberley Hall from Peebles, with her 11 year old daughter Amy and 7 year old daughter Kirsty

BODY TEXT:

Certain groups of Scottish patients with Type 1 Diabetes may soon be able to stop injecting themselves with insulin, through the introduction of a new cell transplant treatment. Lothian Health Board, the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service (SNBTS), and Edinburgh University today launch Scotland's first Islet Transplant Programme.

The Scottish Islet Isolation Laboratory is the only one in the UK which will operate 24 hours a day, and offers a lifeline to a small number of patients initially who until now have had to live with constant blood sugar monitoring and the fear of coma due to low blood glucose. The new treatment involves extracting islets (the cells which produce insulin) from a donated pancreas by a complex and labour intensive laboratory process. They are then injected into the liver of recipients under local anaesthetic.

People who will benefit from this new treatment are those with Type 1, or insulin dependent diabetes, and also kidney transplant recipients. Type 1 diabetes is an auto-immune disease caused when insulin-producing cells are destroyed by cells that normally defend us from invading organisms. It is not known what causes it, but there is some evidence to suggest that a virus infection could start the process off.

Opening the new facility Minister for Public Health Shona Robison said:

"I'm delighted to be launching this groundbreaking programme which will be of great benefit to some groups of people living with Type 1 diabetes.

"The programme's creation represents a significant investment by NHSScotland in helping to tackle a condition that affects increasing numbers of young people. It's also made possible by the close collaboration between the pancreas transplant programme at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service and the Scottish Centre for Regenerative Medicine.



INVESTORS IN PEOPLE



National Director Keith Thompson

“The Scottish Government is investing in a range of initiatives designed to increase the number of actual organ and tissue donors in Scotland, so that programmes like this can continue to save and improve lives.”

Mr. John Casey, Lead Clinician for the Islet Cell Programme said “Islet isolation is a new and highly skilled technique which can prove life saving for some patients who are unaware of the level of sugar in their blood. This technique depends on organ donors, but work at the Scottish Centre for Regenerative Medicine at Edinburgh University gives hope that in the not too distant future islets will be able to be produced from stem cells. This procedure is likely to be one of the first clinical services to benefit from stem cell technology and much of the research infrastructure is already in place for this in Scotland.” There are nearly three million people with diabetes in the UK, with the rate increasing in children annually”.

Keith J Thompson, National Director of the SNBTS added “For nearly 80 years The Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service has been taking red blood cells from one person and processing and testing them so that they can be safely given to patients in need. Being able to do this now with islet cells is a major step forward and our new state of the art laboratory has been specifically designed, equipped and staffed to achieve this. We hope that islet cells prepared here will be able to transform the lives of diabetics who would benefit from this advanced treatment. The development of novel Cell Therapy in Scotland will be significantly enhanced by the experience that we gain in this Islet Cell programme”.

End

Notes to editors

NHS National Services Scotland is the common name for the Common Services Agency for the Scottish Health Service.

The Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service is a Division of NHS National Services Scotland.

For further information on organ donation please contact 0300 123 2323 or alternatively view www.organdonation.nhs.uk