

# CADILLAC News

August 27, 2007

## Stem cell research on the table

SALLY BARBER

CADILLAC — Cadillac has the highest rate per capita of Lou Gehrig's disease of any town in the country. Stem cell research could provide hope for its treatment. That's one reason to pay attention to the stem cell debate.

Cadillac native Dr. Gary Dunbar, a leading stem cell researcher, delivered the findings Friday during a presentation examining the science, potential and laws surrounding stem cell research. He was joined by Marcia Baum, executive director of Michigan Citizens for Stem Cell Research and Cures. The program was part of the Lecture Luncheon Series sponsored by the Cadillac Area Chamber of Commerce and Baker College, Cadillac.

"We recognize this is a topic people feel strongly about. Baker and the chamber of commerce who partner in sponsoring it are not making a statement about our institutions or this issue," said Robert Van Dellen, campus president. "To have a vibrant democracy you have to have open discussion and informed citizens. The object is to provide information on an important topic."

Baum noted the significance of public thought in the future course of stem cell research.

"It's a rare occasion when public policy and opinion have a direct influence on scientific discovery," she said.

Dunbar, director of Central Michigan University's Brain Research and Integrative Neuroscience Center, outlined the characteristics of adult and embryonic cells and their individual potential in developing treatments and cures. Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, heart disease and diabetes are some of the maladies embryonic stem cell research could positively impact, according to Dunbar.

"It's not a miracle," he said. But it could provide effective treatments.

Now among the most restrictive embryonic stem cell research policies in the country, Dunbar would like to see the Michigan's research opportunities on a level playing field with other states.

Michigan policy created in 1978 bans research that would "jeopardize the life or health of the embryo, fetus or neonate." The policies are negatively impacting what has been a part of Michigan's manufacturing cornerstones, the pharmaceutical industry.

"Biotech firms are not going to want to come to Michigan if we don't step up to the plate," Dunbar said.

The law is outdated, Baum told audiences. It doesn't prevent embryonic cells from being destroyed, only bans and criminalizes use in research.

"There is still time for the life science and biomed industry to make an economic contribution," she said.



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Dr. Gary Dunbar, director of Central Michigan University's Brain Research and Integrative Neuroscience Center talks with Carol Vokes following Dunbar's presentation on embryonic stem cell research at Baker College Friday. The lecture was sponsored by Baker and the Cadillac Area Chamber of Commerce to generate local discussion on the issue of embryonic stem cell research.

More than 50 people from various sectors of the community attended the session. In response to the presentation, Barb Aumiller challenged the presenters' motives for promoting policy changes.

"Follow the money trail," she said. "They are looking for federal dollars."

Brian Drabik, D.O., said he believes the most critical matter in the embryonic stem cell debate is to create an educated public capable of basing their opinion on both fact and personal values.

"Who wouldn't like to have a cure for diseases like Huntington's?" Drabik asked. "It's an ethical question each individual must decide for themselves."

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