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# Crohn's disease trial uses stem cells taken from placentas

**Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News**

Detroit — A placenta provides a home for a baby, keeps the mom's body from rejecting it and soon could help patients suffering from Crohn's disease, multiple sclerosis and stroke, officials said Wednesday at the World Stem Cell Summit.

Patients with Crohn's disease, which inflames the digestive tract, have shown improvement with placenta-derived stem cells, which are adult stem cells, said Steven A. Fischkoff, vice president, clinical and medical affairs at Celgene Cellular Therapeutics.

The New Jersey-based biotech company is moving into the second phase of a Food and Drug Administration-approved clinical trial that uses placenta stem cells in patients with Crohn's disease. It also is beginning a trial with patients suffering from multiple sclerosis.

Soon it is planning to seek FDA approval to use the placenta stem cells in patients suffering from stroke, based on the work of a neurology researcher at Henry Ford Health System.

"This could potentially affect a lot of people ... and if we are successful, we will reduce the chances that people will have to go into nursing homes or rely on someone for care," Fischkoff said during the last day of the World Stem Cell Summit. "What really terrorizes people with a lot of these diseases is that they lose their independence."

The World Stem Cell Summit, a global gathering of researchers and leaders in Detroit, wrapped up its sixth annual event Wednesday at the Detroit Marriott. The three-day event, which was preceded by a free day at the Detroit Science Center, brought in nearly 1,000 scientists, industry leaders and advocates.

Attendance was down slightly from last year's summit, but this year's was the best ever staged, said Bernard Siegel, executive director of the Genetics Policy Institute, which presents the summit.

Prior to the summit, University of Michigan announced it had created its first embryonic stem cell line.

During the summit, an announcement was made about the new Oakland University William Beaumont Institute for Stem Cell and Regenerative Medicine. Scientists and companies from around the globe showcased their research and innovations.

"There is a fight to be fought and a war to be won," said Grant Albrecht, a patient advocate living with Transverse Myelitis, a neurological disorder.

The stem cell community has to stay focused on keeping the research on track, Siegel said, and that means mobilizing support for federal funding of embryonic stem cell research, which is currently in jeopardy with a lawsuit that seeks to ban it.

"Funding in the U.S. for embryonic stem cell research is on a knife's edge," Siegel said. "It can go either way. We can go back ... or we can move into the 21st century. If you take the tool out of the tool kit, you delay the research to cures. It is akin to crushing hope."