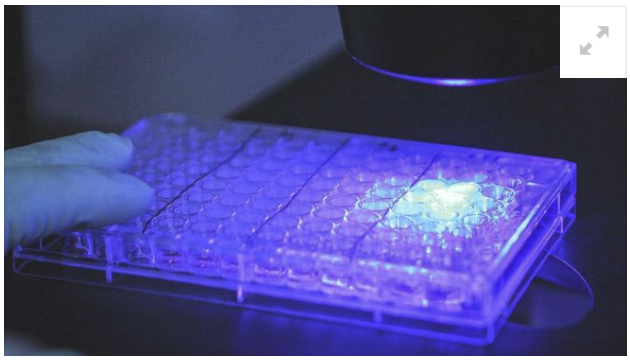
HEALTH CARE

OHSU is proceeding cautiously on new MS treatment using stem cells



Scientific Culture Plate and Microscope

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Nov 24, 2014, 2:03pm PST
Updated Nov 24, 2014, 5:08pm PST

Oregon Health & Science University isn't rushing to use a new a Multiple Sclerosis therapy that uses a person's own stem cells.

Dr. Richard Burt, chief of the division of immunotherapy at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine, on Friday spoke to a group of physicians at OHSU's Multiple Sclerosis Center about use of hematopoietic stem cell transplant (HSCT).

It's a relatively unknown treatment for autoimmune diseases, Burt said. HSCT is

"It's just conveying information," he said. "A lot of people don't know what we do, and they don't really understand and because what we developed came from outside the field of neurology, it's just planting seeds. The fruition of that usually comes later."

It may be some time before the treatment is offered at OHSU.

"We will sit down and discuss in detail with the neurology team," said Dr. Richard Maziarz, who specializes in stem cell transplants at the Knight Cancer Institute. "And if they feel that they can identify a group of patients that could potentially be considered for these treatments, we can then work together in an organized fashion. I'm being cautious in my words, because this isn't the standard of care. It's something in great need of investigation."

Burt has been studying the use of HSCT autoimmune diseases for 30 years, originally with animal models, but the last 14 years in humans, he said. HSCT has been used in 500 patients with autoimmune diseases at Northwestern University, and over 200 with MS, he said, with good results.

In HSCT for MS, stem cells are taken from the patient before they are given the immune suppressive drug Cytoxan and an antibody to immune cells, called rATG, Burt said. The patient is given their own stem cells back after the treatment.

"We maximally suppress the immune system, and then when we give them the stem cells back, it helps them recover faster," he said. "But even if we don't do it, they'll recover fine. ... In reality, there is no transplant. It's a supportive stem cell blood