



findings

The Newsletter of the Nebraska Coalition for Lifesaving Cures

Volume 10, Issue 2

Nebraska Coalition
for Lifesaving Cures

Wilsons Honored at First Annual Lifesaver Luncheon

Dr. Chuck and Linda Wilson were this year's honored guests at the first annual "Lifesaver" luncheon sponsored by the Nebraska Coalition for Lifesaving Cures. The luncheon, held to honor individuals who have shown support for medical research, specifically embryonic stem cell research in Nebraska, took place on September 8th, 2011, at the Country Club of Lincoln.

Those who attended said they were expressing their recognition that research is a vital part of the existence and academic stature of the University of Nebraska system and the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

"The research being supported is being directed to helping those people who are burdened with conditions such as Parkinson's, Juvenile Diabetes, Macular Degeneration, Alzheimer's and Spinal Cord Injuries," said Jon Hinrichs, M.D., co-chair of the luncheon.

The Wilsons have been ardent supporters of medical research in the state. Dr. Wilson served three terms (18 years) on the University of Nebraska Board of Regents where he voted to defend research. Linda Wilson served on the Lincoln City Council for three terms, serving twice as Chair of the Council.

Harold Maurer, M.D., Chancellor of the University of Nebraska Medical Center, served as master of ceremonies for the luncheon. Speakers included: Dr. David Crouse, Sandy Goodman, President of the Nebraska Coalition for Lifesaving Cures, and Jan Leeper.

Harvey Perlman, Chancellor of the University of Nebraska Lincoln, introduced the Wilsons and thanked them for their support of research and academic freedom on all campuses of the university system.

"We were very pleased to have a sell-out luncheon to show appreciation for both Chuck and Linda Wilson and their contribution to the city of Lincoln and the University of Nebraska system. The luncheon was a very successful fundraiser to raise awareness of the Coalition," said Mary Strand, co-chair of the luncheon.



Top:
Linda Wilson and Chuck Wilson, M.D.
proudly display their Lifesaver Award

Above:
Chancellor Harvey Perlman, Jon Hinrichs, M.D., Donna Woods, Linda Wilson, Chuck Wilson, M.D., Mary Strand, Jim Strand, and Chancellor Harold Maurer, M.D.



Geron discontinues stem cell program, CIRM optimistic about future of stem cell therapies

November 15, 2011 | News Release

California-based Geron, Inc. announced that they are discontinuing their stem cell programs, including the trial CIRM has supported testing an embryonic stem cell product for spinal cord injury.

In May, 2011 CIRM announced a \$25 million loan to Geron to support their spinal cord injury trial, which was the first trial of cells derived from embryonic stem cells. Geron had received \$6.42 million of their loan, which the company today repaid in full with accrued interest. The company says they are seeking partners to continue its stem cell programs.

As the first group to receive FDA approval to test human embryonic-derived stem cells in humans, Geron pioneered the regulatory pathway that other groups can learn from.

"We are optimistic about many exciting stem cell programs in California and internationally that have the potential to treat chronic diseases and conditions and that will benefit from the regulatory path first forged by Geron," said Ellen Feigal, Senior Vice President for Research and Development. "Taking research through all the steps needed to get into clinical trials, then through the trials and into the clinic is a highly complicated process with many stops and starts along the way. CIRM plays a critical role in ensuring funding for these early-stage trials, which often have difficulty obtaining funding from other sources."

In the initial stages of Geron's trial, the goal was to find out whether the cells were safe before increasing the dose and assessing whether the cells were effective in treating people with spinal cord injury. The company has reported that the people who enrolled in the trial tolerated the therapy well and had no serious adverse effects after receiving the cells. Geron will continue to closely monitor those patients.

Roman Reed, who received a spinal cord injury in a 1994 football accident, said he remained hopeful that another company would partner with Geron and continue the trial. "On one level I am immediately disappointed with Geron's decision to cease future enrollment of this important trial," said Reed, who is also the namesake of the Roman Reed Spinal Cord Research Act which supports spinal cord injury research in California. "Still, there have been no serious adverse effects, so we just need to find a new corporate partner for this venture because it's still tremendously promising research with sound stem cell science that must be fully fiscally backed to go from bench to bedside."

6 Reasons Mississippians Said No to "Personhood" Amendment

November 8, 2011 | Excerpted from an article written by Burns Strider, Founder, Eleison and The American Values Network, appearing in The Huffington Post, 11/8/11

Only a few months ago strategists were urging their candidates in Mississippi to stay clear of the "Personhood" initiative they'd be sharing space with on the ballot. More than a few candidates, believing it was the only safe path, chose to take a public position in support of the measure defining human life as existing at the moment of conception. Disease, rape, incest not counting as exceptions. Nothing would. Felonies for everyone.

Mississippi has a massively conservative voting base and heavily entrenched conservative politicians and institutions. Polling showed white and black voters overwhelmingly favored the initiative. The unexpected happened. Mississippians defeated "Personhood" driving a stake in the heart of a movement that was planning on sweeping, state by state, through the nation.

Why did they lose in arguably the most conservative state in the Union? Why did the anti-Personhood forces win a majority of the vote in Mississippi? Here are six reasons Personhood failed in Mississippi:

1.) The forces who brought Personhood before the public insulted the intellectual and cultural sensibilities of thousands of Mississippians. They assumed Mississippi would be a cake walk. They were sloppy in their organizing and flippant about their opposition; condescending."

2.) "Mississippians for Healthy Families" organized; then they organized the state around defeating Personhood. It was this group that brought together the policy concerns, messaging and grassroots organizing that synergized the opposition.

3.) The Mississippi NAACP announced their opposition to the measure. Derrick Johnson is the president. He is about as courageous and shrewd as they come. He took a stand. And, you know what? The large percentage of black Mississippians supporting Personhood began to crumble. It was leadership in action. And, it changed the outcome. A voting majority began forming of African Americans, white Democrats and upper middle class, educated white conservatives.

4.) Haley Barbour, the Guv himself, publicly raised concerns about the implications of the measure; right before saying he would vote for it. But, he chose to share his concerns. Haley "green lighted" many to do what they wanted to do. Vote no.

5.) Clergy stood up and said no. The Episcopal and Methodist Bishops for Mississippi publicly opposed the measure. The Catholic Bishop would not support it, instead offering a critical critique. This empowered other ministers to begin speaking out.

6.) The Personhood Initiative language was poorly crafted and made for bad policy. Doctors, for instance, became concerned about the legality of carrying out their oath to save lives. "

Cause of ALS is found, Northwestern team says

Breakthrough in Lou Gehrig's disease could lead to treatment

August 22, 2011 | Excerpted from an article by William Mullen, originally printed in the Chicago Tribune

Researchers at Northwestern University announced in the research journal *Nature* that they have discovered a common cause of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or Lou Gehrig's disease. The significance of this discovery could lead to a possible treatment.

Dr. Teepu Siddique, a neuroscientist with Northwestern's Feinberg School of Medicine, said the key to the breakthrough is the discovery of an underlying disease process for all types of ALS.

The discovery provides an opening to finding treatments for ALS and could also pay dividends by showing the way to treatments for other, more common neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's, dementia and Parkinson's, Siddique said.

The Northwestern team identified the breakdown of cellular recycling systems in the neurons of the spinal cord and brain of ALS patients that results in the nervous system slowly losing its ability to carry brain signals to the body's muscular system.

Without those signals, patients gradually are deprived of the ability to move, talk, swallow and breathe.

"This is the first time we could connect (ALS) to a clear-cut biomedical mechanism," Siddique said. "It has really made the

direction we have to take very clear and sharp. We can now test for drugs that would regulate this protein pathway or optimize it, so it functions as it should in a normal state."

ALS afflicts about 30,000 Americans. With no known treatment for the paralysis, 50 percent of all ALS patients die within three years.

It is particularly tragic because it often strikes people who are very physically active. In 1941, New York Yankee baseball superstar Lou Gehrig died at 37 of the disease that now carries his name.

There are three forms of ALS: "familial," which is hereditary and passed through genes; nonhereditary, which is called "sporadic;" and ALS that targets the brain, called "ALS/dementia."

In the early 1990s, Siddique was part of a study that made a breakthrough discovering the "familial" gene that causes the disease within some families. That breakthrough came after a study of an East Coast family that has lost more than 20 members to ALS.

Add Some Sparkle to Your Life, or Send a Thoughtful Gift to a Loved One

Purchase one of these custom-designed creations, and up to 87 percent of your purchase is tax deductible. Best of all, it helps spread the word about the importance of stem cell research.

The pendant on each necklace, bracelet and bookmark proclaims "Protect Hope" on one side and "Advance Cures" on the other. It's wearable art with a message!

For every piece bought by members of the Nebraska Coalition for Lifesaving Cures, we will receive \$5 from the Missouri Cures Education Foundation, another nonprofit working to advance stem cell research. If you order online, enter "NCLC" in the discount code box to ensure we receive our donation. You should also mention the code if you order by phone at 314-993-1900.



<http://www.missouricures.com/jewelry>

UNMC announces Richard Holland Future Scientist Award winners

By Lisa Spellman, University of Nebraska Medical Center



Pictured left to right are:
Zachariah Holmes, Sasankh BC, Troy Hubbard, Victoria Kohout, Executive Director of Nebraska Coalition for Lifesaving Cures, Michele Stretch, Brooke Sullivan and Kelsey Augustin.

Six undergraduate students from four Nebraska colleges and universities recently received the 2011 Richard Holland Future Scientist Award from the Nebraska Coalition for Lifesaving Cures.

The students received cash prizes totaling \$2,700 Aug. 10 at the annual INBRE (Institutional Development Award (IDeA) Networks of Biomedical Research Excellence Program) conference in Grand Island.

The awards are named in honor of Richard Holland, an Omaha philanthropist and longtime supporter of research.

The students were judged in two categories representing oral and poster presentations of the research work they conducted this summer as part of the INBRE program.

The INBRE program is overseen by James Turpen, Ph.D., professor of genetics, cell biology and anatomy at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. Dr. Turpen is the principal investigator of the \$17.2 million National Institutes of Health grant that funds the program.

Established in 2001, the INBRE Scholars program was created to expose students to serious biomedical research and build a statewide biomedical research infrastructure between undergraduate and graduate institutions.

Upon recommendation of their college professors the students, referred to as INBRE scholars, enter the program after completing their sophomore year of college.

Each undergraduate school nominates approximately three students a year for the program. Once in the program, the students are given two-year scholarships worth \$11,000. The scholarship provides students with \$2,500 during each of their next two undergraduate years and \$3,000 during each of the two summers they are in the program.

The award winners are:

Oral

1st place: Zachariah Holmes, Creighton University

2nd place: Michele Stretch, University of Nebraska at Kearney

3rd place: Sasankh BC, University of Nebraska at Omaha

Poster

1st place: Troy Hubbard, Creighton University

2nd place: Brooke Sullivan, University of Nebraska at Omaha

3rd place: Kelsey Augustin, Wayne State College

Save the date
as we honor
**Fred and
Eve Simon**

TENTH ANNUAL TRIBUTE LUNCHEON

MONDAY, APRIL 23, 2012

11:30 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.

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