

# Health & Science

## Japanese experience "Mad Cow" disease

Dozens of Japanese brain surgery patients died from a rare contagion linked to "mad cow" disease after Japanese health officials failed to act on a U.S. warning, a newspaper reported Tuesday.

The officials were aware of a 1987 warning by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration that the deadly disease could be contracted from transplants of the tissue that covers the brain and upper spinal column, the newspaper Mainichi said.

Although the warning was translated into Japanese by the end of 1987, officials at the Health and Welfare Ministry failed to ensure the safety of transplants or imports of the tissue, called dura matter.

The newspaper quoted Takeshi Kitamura, former director of Japan's National Institute of Health, as saying he told ministry officials of the

warning in 1987. The health ministry's own research now indicates infected dura matter is the most likely cause of 43 cases of mad cow disease since 1985. Most victims of the disease were infected after the FDA issued its warning, Kitamura said.

Japanese officials did not recall the products listed in the FDA warning until last month, the Mainichi said. The delay, it said, was partly due to assurances by a German exporter named in the FDA warning that its products were safe.

No one answered the telephones at the ministry after business hours Tuesday.

Mad cow disease causes the brain to shrink, leading to progressive dementia, paralysis and usually death.

## New surgery may help the nearsighted

Folks who are nearsighted may soon have an alternative to glasses, contacts and laser surgery to correct their vision.

Tiny, transparent rings implanted into the cornea are currently being tested.

The plastic rings are slightly thicker than a contact lens and are designed to be

permanent. But they can be removed if better, cheaper procedures are developed or if wearers don't like them.

Tests are under way at ten health centers pending Food and Drug Administration approval.

The rings could help about 20 million adults who have mild nearsightedness.

## Understanding clones

The cloning of an adult sheep by Scottish scientists is a fundamental advance in biology that the public must understand and scientists must explain, the director of the National Science Foundation said Tuesday.

"The American public does not have a good grounding for the imminent debate about cloning," said Dr. Neal Lane, who heads the principal federal agency for dispensing general science research grants. "And the science and engineering community does not have a good grounding in dialogue with the public about the science."

"As a civilization, we cannot afford for this situation to continue," he added.

By creating a new adult animal, a sheep named Dolly, from the cells of another adult animal, said Lane, "it is likely that a whole new chapter in biology will be opened, with poten-

tial health, medical and economic benefits."

Speaking at the National Press Club, he warned that the cloning discovery is a double-edged sword that "may well outstrip or violate society's definition of what constitutes our concept of human individuality."

This new science, said Lane, demands extensive public discussion and requires scientists to give careful, clear explanations of what cloning and other discoveries mean and how they might affect society.

"As a society, let us not be naysayers about new knowledge, nor timid about technology," said Lane. "But let us not shirk the societal responsibility for their use and misuse."

Science is neither good nor evil, he said. The good or evil is in how it is used.

## Free Health Screenings to KEEP You and Your Family Healthy

The National Kidney Foundation of Oregon and Southwest Washington will conduct a free health screening for people at an increased risk for kidney disease, particularly those with diabetes or high blood pressure or with a parent, grandparent or sibling who has high blood pressure, diabetes or chronic kidney failure. The screening, to be held on May 24, 1997, from 8 am to 6 pm, at Dishman Community Center, 77 NE Knot, is part of the foundation's new Kidney Early Evaluation Program (KEEP).

"Diabetes and uncontrolled high blood pressure are the leading causes of kidney failure for the more than 250,000 Americans who require regular treatment on a dialysis machine," according to Richard Drake, MD, chairman of the National Kidney Foundation of Oregon and Southwest Washington's Medical Advisory Board. "By targeting people who have these conditions themselves or in their family we hope to identify more individuals who are at increased risk of

kidney disease," he says. "We know that early detection and intervention may help prevent the onset of kidney failure and save lives."

Because African-Americans have high rates of diabetes, high blood pressure, and as a result, have an increased risk of developing kidney disease, a special effort has been made to recruit African-Americans for the screening program. African-Americans represent about 30 percent of the US population.

Participants in the screening will have their weight and blood pressure measured and will be given a complete health risk appraisal, which includes questions about current health status, health history and family health history.

They will also receive educational materials about preventing and treating kidney disease, high blood pressure and diabetes. Medical professionals will collect blood and urine samples from individuals who require further testing for kidney disease.

In many cases, kidney failure can be prevented or delayed through

education, early intervention, and proper treatment. The National Kidney Foundation of Oregon and Southwest Washington urges individuals identified in these risk groups to attend the free screenings to learn how improving or maintaining their level of health, as well as getting proper medical attention when necessary, may help prevent or delay the onset of kidney disease. To make an appointment for the screening, call the National Kidney Foundation of Oregon and Southwest Washington at 282-0990.

The National Kidney Foundation is the major voluntary health agency seeking the total answer to diseases of the kidney and urinary tract. The National Kidney Foundation of Oregon and Southwest Washington is one of 51 Affiliates across the country bringing help and hope to the millions of Americans who suffer from kidney disease, through research, patient services, organ transplant programs, professional education and public information.

## FDA approves Redux for obesity

The Food and Drug Administration said Monday it continues to monitor the cases of patients experiencing side effects while taking the anti-obesity drug Redux, but says thus far there have been no unexpected findings.

"The data to date regarding Redux do not raise any red flags," said agency spokesman Don McLearn.

The agency's comment came after The Associated Press reported Friday that many scientists question why the government has let Redux sell so long without having the manufacturer, Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories, study a possible brain-damaging side effect. The FDA approved Redux for sale a year ago, and that study is expected to begin soon, the agency says.

The AP also reported Friday that some critics fear the potent drug is being inappropriately prescribed to many Americans, including those not severely overweight.

The FDA said Monday that it had provided incorrect information to the AP about one specific case cited in the story, the death of a woman who had been prescribed Redux.

The woman weighed 220 pounds, not 120 pounds as it had said earlier, the FDA said. The agency also dis-

closed Monday, based on further information provided by Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories, that the woman also had been taking an anti-anxiety drug.

A local coroner's inquest determined she had very high levels of that anti-anxiety drug in her body when she died, and ruled the death was a homicide, not an accidental death or suicide. Local and state officials continue to investigate the death and no criminal charges have been filed.

The company that developed Redux, Interneuron Pharmaceuticals Inc., and Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories reiterated on Monday their position that scientific evidence has shown Redux to be safe when used as recommended.

Initial data collected about patients reveal "no evidence indicating a higher-than-expected occurrence of adverse events related to the central nervous system," the companies said in a joint statement.

The FDA examines all reports of adverse reactions among patients taking prescription drugs, such as Redux.

To date, it has received notification of 18 deaths of patients who had been taking Redux, including three

suicides, and is examining all those cases, said McLearn, the agency spokesman.

The FDA said that, based on information collected thus far, it had not noted any side-effect patterns inconsistent with what its scientific advisers expected when the agency approved Redux.

The FDA insists that only the severely obese try Redux, because its users have 23 times the average risk of a rare but often fatal lung ailment called primary pulmonary hypertension.

Yet, recent side-effect reports sent to the agency listed weights for just 27 of 51 patients - and 14 were below the government weight guidelines for use of the drug, the FDA says.

In addition, the FDA approved Redux on the condition that Wyeth-Ayerst study whether the drug damages the human brain cells that produce serotonin. Previous studies in mice, rats, monkeys and baboons show that high doses destroy those cells - raising fears of side effects such as depression if the same thing happens to people.

The study of effects on human brain cells is expected to start soon, the FDA says.

## A Star (Research Park) is born

A science and research park at the heart of Washington County's high-tech region known as Sunset Corridor became reality this week with the incorporation of members.

Science, Technology and Research Park (STAR Park) includes the Oregon Health Sciences University (OHSU), Oregon Regional Primate Research Center (ORPRC), Oregon Graduate Institute, Center for Advanced Partnerships in Technology and Learning (CAPITAL Center), Washington County ESD, Oregon State System of Higher Education, Portland Community College, and Wells Fargo Bank.

"STAR Park will be a unifying force in this community of shared interests," said P. Michael Conn, Ph.D., who has been guiding its formation. "The Park will allow partner institutions to pool resources in the pursuit of research, educational and technological interests and will serve as a catalyst for the emergence of new biotechnology companies."

Conn, who is Associate Director of the Primate Research Center and Special Assistant to the President of OHSU, foresees that some of OHSU's anticipated growth will occur at STAR Park. "Dr. (Peter) Kohler (President of OHSU) has indicated that while most of OHSU's expansion will take place in Portland, it may be appropriate to locate certain facilities close to the Primate Center, which is an OHSU affiliate."

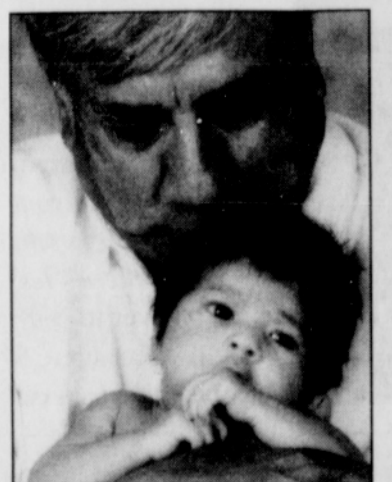
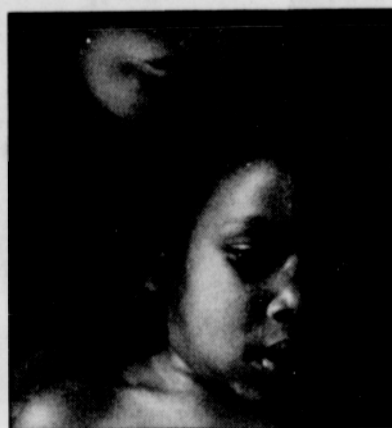
**"STAR Park will be a unifying force in this community of shared interests"**

STAR Park comprises some 350 acres. It boasts a current employee head count of 1,750 and a current weekly student population of 3,200.

Among the park's immediate goals are to develop a common master plan and work for the improvement of local transit and transportation.

STAR Park is the second such research park in Oregon. The first, which received its impetus from former governor, Neil Goldschmidt, is the Riverfront Research Park in Eugene. Oregon Senator Ron Wyden has promised "very aggressive support" for the Hillsboro newcomer.

## SOME BOO-BOOS, A KISS CAN'T FIX.



**Polio. Measles. Diphtheria. Whooping Cough.** The fact is, once a child contracts a scary disease like this, there's not much a parent can do. It's up to the doctors. And fate. Which makes it inconceivable that 33% of Oregon children still aren't fully immunized by the age of two.

Yes, School Law requires they be immunized by kindergarten. But unfortunately, that law also creates the perception that it's okay to wait until then. People don't realize that waiting puts their infants at risk. Unimmunized infants are not protected. Therefore, they are more likely to get diseases and to have severe side effects from them.

Truth is, 80% of all vaccines can be given by age two. Safely. All it takes is four quick visits to the doctor. Meaning you must follow through with all the shots. They don't have to cost a lot either.

Most important, don't be afraid to ask your doctor, nurse practitioner or health department questions. And keep track of your child's immunization schedule. After all, the one who can best take care of your baby is you.

## FREE IMMUNIZATIONS AVAILABLE APRIL 20-26.

For more information about free clinics in your area call your local health department or 1-800-SAFENET (1-800-723-3638) or in the Portland Metro area call 306-5858. Bring your child's immunization record to the free clinic. Call your local health department to see if chickenpox vaccine will be available.



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