Join us for a special event: Never a vacation!

Because there is never a vacation from caring for one’s diabetes.

12:30 p.m., Sunday, June 23, 2013, Interlachen Country Club, Edina, Minn.

Enjoy a luncheon and style show featuring adult and children’s clothing from designers and retailers. Proceeds support the University’s diabetes immunology research led by Brian File, Ph.D.

 Adults: $100, Children: $25
For tickets or more information, contact Ellie Cadmus at 612-920-7243.

Register now!
Golf Classic “Fore” Diabetes Research
June 17, 2013
Town and Country Club, St. Paul, Minn.

Join us for a day of golf, food, and fun at the 17th annual Golf Classic “Fore” Diabetes Research, which has raised nearly $5 million to advance a cure for diabetes at the University’s Schulze Diabetes Institute. The tournament includes morning and afternoon rounds, an exceptional live auction, and a lunch and dinner program.

Visit http://c.umn.edu/golfclassic to register.

Discoveries in Diabetes Spring 2013

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Robin White, Editor
Karin Miller, Writer
Lisa Haines, juju Design

To learn more or make a gift, contact: Jean Gorell, CFRE
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Family foundation backs artificial pancreas project
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U of M: A leader in human islet transplantation

The transplantation of islets from a donor pancreas into a diabetic patient has been studied since the 1970s. In fact, the first transplant of its kind to treat type 1 diabetes occurred at the University in 1974. Numerous studies and clinical trials have followed, with tremendous progress in recent years.

In 2004, the University was selected as one of three principal sites to conduct phase III clinical trials in human islet transplants—a $500 million, multicenter trial supported by the National Institutes of Health. The clinical trial was a success for patients like Olson and many others, giving them lives free from diabetes.

“No other center has enrolled more patients than the U of M,” says Bernhard Hering, M.D., scientific director of the University’s Schulze Diabetes Institute. “The U of M has been a major contributor to this study at several levels.”

The best results

Today, the U’s clinical trials are delivering the world’s best results: all transplant recipients were maintained insulin independence for five years post-transplant.

“It is fair to say that both the efficacy and safety results are very favorable and clearly document the feasibility of the human islet transplants in helping and treating people with type 1 diabetes complicated by hypoglycemic unawareness,” Hering says.

He emphasizes how miserable life can be for those with hypoglycemic unawareness, recalling stories of patients who have lost jobs, homes, and marriages. But after receiving the islet transplant, patients seem to get a second chance at a normal life.

“With islet transplantation, people now, for the very first time, can enjoy a life no longer restricted by constant fears and worries. We consider this a privilege, being able to participate in this life-changing research,” Hering says.

Funding still needed

With decades of research complete, the University has one more step: securing a biologic license from the FDA to procure islets from donor pancreases for transplantation, a process that will require about $5 million.

A lead gift of $50,000 from Wally and Cecy Faster in January of this year will help the University on its way to raising the funds needed to become the first U.S. clinic to transplant human islets in an approved medical procedure.

Once licensed, the University will offer patients greater access to islet transplantation and will use this treatment as the platform for continuing to develop the next-generation of transplantation cures, including the use of pig and stem cell islets, with minimal or no antirejection drugs.

Today Olson is busy spreading the gospel of islet transplantation, speaking to groups about the transformational procedure. “It’s one way for me to contribute,” she says, “to say thank you and to help make future transplants possible, especially for children.”

Crossing the finish line (continued from cover)

A game-changer

Family foundation backs artificial pancreas research

Siobhan O’Brien Olson grew up understanding the importance of community giving. In fact, her family’s Alice M. O’Brien Foundation has been supporting numerous charities in Minnesota for 60 years. Nearly eight years ago, the foundation established the O’Brien BioBank for lung research at the University of Minnesota—just one of numerous gifts the foundation has made to support medical research at the University.

But it is the foundation’s latest gift of $15,000 to support diabetes research at the University that’s top of mind for Siobhan Olson and her husband, Dave Olson. “Diabetes affects every side of our family in some way, shape, or form,” says O’Brien Olson. “When we heard about the artificial pancreas project [featured in the last issue of Discoverias in Diabetes], we thought it could really be a game-changer.”

Diagnosed at age 17 with type 1 diabetes, Dave Olson appreciates the project’s research potential. A few years ago, when adding a continuous glucose monitoring system to his insulin pump, he asked how the system and the pump communicate and was surprised to learn that the pump did not take in that glucose information to automatically adjust the insulin dose.

That could all change with the creation of an artificial pancreas that uses a wireless sensor being developed by Steven Koester, Ph.D., a professor in the University’s electrical engineering department. The monitor, which is still in the design phase, senses glucose levels and sends that information to the pump, which automatically supplies the correct amount of insulin.

A call for proposals from the Minnesota Partnership for Biotechnology and Medical Genomics—a collaboration of the University and Mayo Clinic—sparked Koester’s search for potential research partners at Mayo. There he found Yogesh Kudva, M.B.B.S., and Ananda Basu, M.B.B.S., M.D., who were building an artificial pancreas but had run into sensor issues.

“In talking together,” Koester says, “we realized they had a sensor problem my idea could potentially solve.” Since then, the trio has made impressive progress, but they have more work ahead and need additional support.

This project is buoyed by the Minnesota Partnership for Biotechnology and Medical Genomics’ statewide campaign to prevent, treat, and cure diabetes—called Decade of Discovery. But Koester says that private philanthropy remains critical, and he’s grateful for the generosity of donors like the Alice M. O’Brien Foundation. “It’s vital to sustain this project as we gather data and write proposals,” he adds.

The Olsons hope the breakthrough comes soon. “It seems like a natural next step, and I think they’re very close,” says Dave Olson. “This technology will go a long way toward substantially improving the lives of those of us who live each day with diabetes.”

“Faster in January of this year will help the University on its way to raising the funds needed to become the first U.S. clinic to transplant human islets in an approved medical procedure.”

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